

The New Cold War in the Caribbean: Is there a Road Back to Normalization?
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On July 20, 2015, a crowd of well-wishers looked on under a sweltering summer sun as an honor guard of three Cuban soldiers raised the flag over their embassy in Washington, DC, marking the restoration of formal diplomatic relations after a sixty year hiatus. In a speech following the flag-raising ceremony, Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez was hopeful about the opportunity for better relations that President Barack Obama's opening to Cuba represented, but also realistic that the road ahead would be long and hard. "The challenge is huge," he cautioned, "because there have never been normal relations between the United States of America and Cuba."¹

From 1898 to 1959, the United States dominated the island economically, politically, and culturally. As former U.S. Ambassador Earl E. T. Smith told the U.S. Senate, "Until the advent of Castro, ...the American Ambassador was the second most important man in Cuba; sometimes even more important than the president."² To Cuban nationalists, Fidel Castro among them, this was not a normal relationship between two sovereign states.

The loss of U.S. hegemony after the triumph of the revolution did not go over well in Washington. The determination of the revolutionary government to secure Cuba's full independence and assert its unrestricted sovereignty struck U.S. policymakers as an abrupt rupture of normality—the "normality" of U.S. dominance, which they took to be both natural and beneficial to Cuba. That rupture was intolerable, and by the summer of 1959, the Eisenhower administration had already decided that the continued existence of Cuba's revolutionary government was not compatible with the national interests of the United States.

That decision established regime change as the strategic focus of U.S. policy toward Cuba, a focus that has endured, with only brief interruption, for the ensuing sixty-three years. The break in diplomatic relations in January 1961 marked the formal end to "normal" diplomatic relations, but Washington had embarked on a multi-faceted program of subversion a full year before, including paramilitary attacks, support for the internal opposition, propaganda broadcasts, and economic sanctions.

Over the following decades, the policy instruments of regime change evolved and Washington's preference for some over others shifted across different presidential administrations. But the core elements of the policy of regime change remained in place: (1) the absence (until 2015) of normal diplomatic relations, signaling that the United States regarded the government of Cuba as illegitimate; (2) the economic embargo, preventing the development of normal commercial and cultural relations, impeding both trade and travel; (3) efforts to isolate Cuba internationally, multiplying the impact of U.S. sanctions; and (4) material support for opponents' efforts to subvert the Cuban government.

From Coercive Diplomacy to Constructive Engagement

President Obama's announcement on December 17, 2014, marked a fundamental break with the past because he explicitly repudiated regime change as the goal of U.S. policy, instead embracing peaceful coexistence. He believed constructive U.S. engagement would create a favorable environment for Cuba's internal dynamics of economic and political change, shaping development toward more open markets and democratic politics. This was what Ben Rhodes called "the long game." Obama describe this "theory of the case" to ABC News anchor David Muir during his 2016 visit to Cuba. "What we were doing for fifty years did not work," the president began. "We can't force changes on Cuba.... Ultimately it's not up to the United States to determine both Cuba's form of government as well as its economy." But that did not mean passivity on the part of the United States:

I think it is very important for the United States not to view ourselves as the agents of change here but rather to encourage and facilitate Cubans themselves to bring about change.... I do believe that as a consequence of interaction with the United States, as a consequence of more Americans traveling here, as a consequence of remittances that are providing small businesses the opportunity to get started here, that then leads to a significant change and over time what you're going to end up seeing is a more prosperous and freer Cuba.³

Some Cubans, perhaps first and foremost Fidel Castro, doubted Obama's good intentions and saw the policy shift not as a fundamental departure from regime change but as simply a new strategy deploying soft power rather than hard. In a front-page article in the Communist Party daily, *Granma*, Castro chided Obama for trying to "elaborate theories on Cuban politics," and warned him against "the illusion" that Cubans would renounce the achievements of the revolution for blandishments from the United States. "We do not need the empire to give us anything," he declared.⁴ A veteran journalist followed up with an even harsher front-page attack, warning that Obama was especially dangerous because of his charisma and stage presence. "There is no doubt: Obama is the gentle and seductive face" of imperialism, whose aim was "to contribute to the fragmentation of Cuban society in order to recover U.S. hegemony."⁵

Adherents of this "Trojan Horse" theory could point to the fact that despite Obama's rhetoric, key features of the traditional regime change policy remained in place. The 1996 Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act enshrined the embargo into law. The 2000 Trade Sanctions and Export Enhancement Act specifically limited travel to Cuba. Foreign assistance legislation continued to fund "democracy promotion" programs to undermine the Cuban government, and TV/Radio Martí continued to beam anti-government propaganda to the island. Other laws imposed a variety of restrictions on interactions with Cuba, all beyond the power of the president to change unilaterally. The persistence of these hostile elements of U.S. policy contributed to the Cuban government's suspicion that Obama offer of engagement was duplicitous.

These internal contradictions in Obama's policy, along with the legacy of distrust fostered by 50 years of hostility, caused some Cubans to underestimate how profound Obama's change in U.S. policy was. The idea that Washington would allow Cubans to direct their own national development without coercive interference from the United States was a fundamentally different policy, even though Obama hoped that the United States could influence Cuban developments through diplomacy, commercial engagement, and travel. Obama was the only U.S. president to openly call for an end to the embargo without conditionality.

Trump Strikes Back

During the 2016 presidential campaign, Donald Trump energized the Republican Party's Cuban American base in Florida by pledging to roll back Obama's Cuba policy. Trump won just over 50 percent of Florida's Cuban American vote, polling only slightly better than Mitt Romney in 2012.⁶ Nevertheless, Trump felt he owed the community a political debt, an idea reinforced at every opportunity by Senator Marco Rubio (R-Fla.). The president himself was not especially invested in Cuba policy, and willingly outsourced it to Republican Cuban American legislators. "Make Rubio happy," he instructed his staff.⁷

On June 16, 2017, Rubio tweeted a photo of himself and Rep. Mario Díaz-Balart (R-Fla.) in Rubio's Senate office, captioned, "the night @MarioDB and I hammered out the new Cuba policy." The next day, Trump made good on his campaign promise. "Effective immediately, I am canceling the last administration's completely one-sided deal with Cuba," he declared to a cheering crowd of Cuban exiles in Miami. In rhetoric reminiscent of the Cold War, Trump denounced the Cuban government as brutal, criminal, depraved, oppressive, and murderous. An initial round of sanctions limited "people-to-people" educational travel and prohibited transactions with a long list of Cuban enterprises managed by the armed forces, including major hotels where U.S. tour groups normally stayed.⁸

In September, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson downsized the U.S. embassy in Havana after two dozen U.S. personnel reported suffering unexplained neurological symptoms—the so-called "Havana Syndrome."⁹ The embassy's consular section stopped processing Cuban visa requests and suspended both the Family Reunification Program and the refugee program. Cubans seeking visas were forced to travel to a third country to apply, travel that few could afford. Pressured by Rubio, Tillerson also expelled an equivalent group of Cuban diplomats from Washington.

In 2019, the Trump administration launched a "maximum pressure" campaign to cut off Cuba's principal sources of foreign currency in hopes of collapsing the Cuban economy and the regime along with it. Trump activated Title III of the 1996 Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act, enabling U.S. nationals, including Cuban Americans, who lost property after the 1959 revolution to sue Cuban, U.S., or foreign companies in U.S. federal court for "trafficking" in (i.e., making beneficial use of) their confiscated property.¹⁰ The aim was to deter foreign investments in Cuba by raising the specter of extended litigation.

The administration targeted Cuba's energy supply by imposing sanctions on companies shipping Venezuelan oil to Cuba, aggravating fuel shortages.¹¹ The State Department pressured countries to end their medical assistance programs with Cuba, and conservative governments in Brazil, Ecuador, Bolivia, and El Salvador quickly obliged. The Brazilian program, by far the largest, involved over 11,000 medical personnel, generating \$250 million in annual revenue for Cuba.¹²

Trump's most serious blows focused on travel and remittances. The administration eliminated the people-to-people category of travel entirely, blocking the majority of non-Cuban American travelers.¹³ It severed commercial and charter air links to all Cuban cities except Havana, and prohibited U.S. cruise ships, which carried some 800,000 people to Cuba in 2018, from docking there.¹⁴ Remittances, unlimited under Obama, were capped by the Trump administration at \$1,000 per quarter, and just weeks before the presidential election, Trump blocked Cuban Americans from sending remittances through Western Union.¹⁵ Remittances fell from an estimated \$3.7 billion in 2019 to \$1.9 billion in 2021.¹⁶ By the end of the Trump

administration, U.S. economic sanctions against Cuba were the most severe they had been since the Nixon administration and were wreaking havoc on the Cuban economy.

Biden's Unkept Promises

During the 2020 presidential campaign, Joe Biden criticized Trump's policy because it had "inflicted harm on the Cuban people and done nothing to advance democracy and human rights." He promised that he would resume Obama's policy of engagement "in large part," lifting sanctions that hurt Cuban families, restoring Americans right to travel, and re-engaging the Cuban government diplomatically. When Trump closed the main channel for wiring remittances to the island in the closing weeks of the campaign, the Biden camp called it a "cruel distraction... denying Cuban Americans the right to help their families."¹⁷

However, Biden and the Democrats took a beating among Cuban American voters in 2020. Trump won more than 60 percent of their vote in Miami-Dade—the most since George W. Bush in 2000, and Democrats lost two House seats in south Florida.¹⁸ This electoral rout made the incoming administration hyper-sensitive about the domestic political risks of any opening to Cuba. Biden also had to contend with Senator Robert Menendez (D-NJ), chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and a bitter foe of engagement with Cuba. To assure Menendez's cooperation on Biden's foreign policy agenda, the president consulted him regularly on Cuba, while pro-engagement congressional Democrats found it hard to get an audience at the White House.¹⁹

Despite his campaign promises, Biden left Trump's sanctions in place during his first 16 months in office. White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said the policy was under review, but noted that it was "not among President Biden's top priorities."²⁰ Juan Gonzalez, Senior Director for Western Hemisphere Affairs on the National Security Council staff, repeatedly voiced skepticism about engagement. "The idea that ... a president has to just go back to the way things were with Cuba does not understand our current context," he said.²¹

Cuba policy was still "under review" when the July 11, 2021, protests in Cuba forced the issue onto Biden's agenda. As videos of Cubans chanting anti-government slogans and fighting with police went viral, avoidance was no longer an option. On July 12, Biden made a brief statement in support of the protestors.²² Rubio immediately denounced him for not doing enough to help them. Conservative Cuban Americans blocked traffic in Miami and demonstrated in front of the White House demanding U.S. military intervention. Liberal Democrats blamed the unrest in Cuba on the humanitarian crisis there, and urged Biden to relax sanctions to ease the suffering of Cuban families.

On July 22, Biden imposed individual sanctions on senior officials of Cuba's Interior Ministry, armed forces, the national police, and the military police for their role in suppressing the demonstrations. The sanctions targeted human rights abusers and corrupt actors by freezing their assets in the United States and banning their entry. The sanctions were largely symbolic since none of the people targeted had assets in the United States (if they did, those assets would have been frozen by the embargo) and none were likely to apply for visas.

Biden also promised to increase support for Cuban dissidents and explore ways to provide Internet service independent of the Cuban government, which suspended certain social media apps on July 11 to halt the viral spread of the protests. Ideas floated by Republicans ranged from satellites to a powerful WiFi hot spot at the U.S. Embassy or Guantánamo Naval Station, to balloons in the stratosphere (reminiscent of the blimp known as "Fat Albert" that once broadcast Radio Marti to Cuba before it was destroyed by hurricanes).²³

To mollify pro-engagement Democrats, Biden created a Remittances Working Group to find a way to get remittances to Cuban families, circumventing Cuban government. He also affirmed that the State Department was working on how to safely re-staff the U.S. embassy in Havana and reopen the consular section for Cubans seeking immigrant visas. By closing consular services, the Trump administration had left most Cubans no safe, legal way to emigrate and immigrant visas issued to Cubans had fallen 90 percent. But despite these pledges, policy did not change. “After July 11, we hit the pause button,” explained Juan Gonzalez.²⁴ Over the ensuing months, Cuban courts convicted hundreds of people arrested during and after the protests, imposing heavy sentences ranging from five to twenty-years in prison for those charged with violence against police, government, or commercial establishments. The proceedings drew international criticism, making it even more difficult politically for Biden, who prided himself on his support for human rights, to take any positive steps to improve relations.

Summit of the Americas

Biden’s Cuba policy might have remained paused indefinitely if the White House had not been pushed into action by the surge of Cuban migrants at the U.S. southern border, and the prospect of embarrassment at the Summit of the Americas. From October 2021 through May 2022, the number of irregular Cuban migrants was more than three times as many as in the entire previous year. Meanwhile, several Latin American presidents, foremost among them Mexico’s Andrés Manuel López Obrador, threatened to boycott the June Summit in Los Angeles over Biden’s decision to exclude Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua.

On May 16, 2022, the Biden administration announced a series of Cuba policy changes on immigration, travel, and remittances in hopes of avoiding a Summit boycott, although in the end Mexico and half a dozen other states still sent lower level delegations rather than their heads of state.²⁵ The May measures included a pledge to restart the Cuban Family Reunification Program suspended by President Trump, and resume the 1994 and 1995 migration agreements with which the Trump administration refused to comply. However, at the end of 2022, the consular section of the U.S. Embassy remained under-staffed and most Cuban applicants still had to travel to another country to apply for a visa.

Meanwhile, the migration surge continued unabated. From October 2021 to October 2022 (the U.S. government’s fiscal year), U.S. Customs and Border Protection encountered more than 224,000 irregular Cuban migrants—more than arrived in the 1980 Mariel boatlift and the 1994 rafters crisis combined.²⁶ Cubans arriving at the southern U.S. border received preferential entry into the United States enabling them to adjust their status under the Cuban Adjustment Act and remain as permanent residents—a practice that incentivized more Cubans to make the dangerous journey through Mexico.²⁷ This represented a de facto retrogression to the wet foot/dry foot policy that President Obama eliminated in January 2017, since Cubans intercepted at sea by the Coast Guard were still being returned to Cuba.

Biden also restored the people-to-people educational travel category, used by more than 638,000 U.S. visitors a year until Trump abolished it in June 2019.²⁸ U.S. air service to cities other than Havana was restored, making it easier for Cuban Americans to visit family members living in the interior. However, the State Department continued to prohibit U.S. travelers from staying at hotels in which the Cuban government had an ownership interest, a ban that included almost all major hotels. Very few privately owned hotels in Cuba could accommodate more than 10 people, which was smaller than the groups most large tour operators handle, so large operators did not return to the Cuban market. Biden also retained the Trump-era prohibitions on

individual people-to-people travel and cruise ship visits, so the new travel measures had little practical effect.

In potentially the most important change, Biden lifted Trump's limits on remittances, which promised to put more money into the hands of Cuban families at a time when access to foreign exchange currency was decisive for a family's standard of living. However, the administration retained the prohibition on U.S. remittance service providers like Western Union doing business with their Cuban counterpart, FINCIMEX because it was part of the military's business conglomerate. With wire services unavailable, Cuban Americans still had to use informal channels, including family visits and "mules" who carry remittances as a business. In short, Biden's measures were good in theory but weak in practice because the administration failed to take the steps necessary to make the new policy effective. This was a recurrent pattern in the first two years of Biden's presidency: promises of policy change did not materialize into significant change on the ground.

Politics and Ideology

Biden's Cuba policy was a product of both domestic politics and the ideology underpinning his foreign policy. In the White House, the political calculation remained unchanged from the 2020 campaign: avoid Cuba because doing anything positive entailed political costs, especially in Florida, with no off-setting political gains. Speaking at the U.S. Institute for Peace in September 2022, Juan Gonzalez observed that Latin America, more than most regions, involved "tremendous domestic equities... It's hard to take politics out of consideration when you're making policy."²⁹

A Florida International University poll conducted in mid-2022 showed Democrats at a deep disadvantage among Cuban American voters in south Florida, outnumbered by Republicans two-to-one in party registration. Support for the embargo, which had been falling prior to President Trump's election, rebounded to 63 percent, with recent immigrants almost as strongly in favor as early ones. Only policies involving family ties garnered majority support. Cuban Americans overwhelmingly opposed President Biden's Cuba policy, 72 percent to 28 percent—even though Biden's policy was not substantially different than Trump's. In fact, Cuban American antipathy toward Democrats went beyond Cuba policy, reaching across a wide range of policy issues, foreign and domestic. According to exit polls, 67 percent of Cuban Americans in Florida voted for Rubio in the 2022 mid-term elections, and 69 percent for Gov. Ron DeSantis.³⁰

Despite this clear alignment of most Cuban Americans with the Republican party, Biden nevertheless gave the diaspora a privileged role crafting his Cuba policy, calling Cuban Americans "a vital partner" and "the best experts on the issue." After a number of consultations with Cuban Americans by White House officials, Biden met with nine prominent members of the community at the suggestion of Sen. Menendez on July 19, 2021. The president promised to "make sure that their voices are included and uplifted at every step of the way."³¹ Just as President Trump outsourced his Cuba policy to Sen. Rubio, Biden outsourced his to Sen. Menendez and select members of the Cuban American diaspora. Not since the China Lobby dictated U.S. policy in East Asia in the mid-twentieth century had an exile community exercised such influence over foreign policy.

The White House's deference to domestic politics was reinforced by the president's conviction that the struggle between democracy and autocracy will determine "the future and direction of our world."³² The Biden Doctrine had strong echoes of the early Cold War when the

United States and its Western European allies were arrayed against the Soviet Union and Communist China—the same geostrategic adversaries Biden identified as contemporary authoritarian threats.³³

The new Cold War did not bode well for Cuba. As a “strategic partner” of Russia and a commercial partner of China, Cuba—despite efforts in recent years to diversify its international relationships—appeared to Biden to be firmly in the adversaries’ camp. Cuba’s socialist ideology, one party system, and intolerance of organized opposition reinforced the administration’s framing of Cuba as an authoritarian ally of Russia and China. That, in turn, revived the strategic concerns that were the foundation for U.S. hostility toward Havana during the first Cold War, before Cuban Americans became a potent political force. With both foreign policy and domestic politics reinforcing a hostile U.S. stance toward Cuba, the likelihood of Biden renewing Obama’s policy of engagement appeared remote.

Nevertheless, by the end of 2022, the balance of costs and benefits around U.S. policy toward Cuba had changed in favor of engagement. The left turn in Latin American politics, combined with China’s concerted efforts to expand its influence in the region, imposed real and growing diplomatic costs on Washington for clinging to an ineffective Cuba policy. Meanwhile, the consolidation of Florida as a red state in the 2022 midterm elections, with Cuban American Republicans in the vanguard, made the domestic political problem of Cuba moot for Democrats. Florida and Cuban American voters were beyond their reach for the foreseeable future. For a Democratic president, there more to gain diplomatically by engagement than there was to lose politically.

The Road Back

In the final months of 2022, there were signs that Biden and his foreign policy team recognize that their Latin America policy was in disarray, and that they needed to change course—at least a little. In November, Biden appointed former Senator Christopher Dodd as Special Presidential Advisor for the Americas. During his Senate career, Dodd was a fierce opponent of Ronald Reagan’s wars in Central America and a leading voice for a progressive U.S. policy, including an end to the embargo against Cuba.

After Hurricane Ian tore through western Cuba in October, the State Department offered two million dollars in humanitarian assistance, which Havana gratefully accepted. Migration talks in November led Cuba to resume accepting deportation flights of illegal migrants, and Washington pledged to resume issuing immigrant visas at the U.S. Embassy in compliance with the 1994 and 2017 migration agreements. That same month, the Treasury Department licensed a U.S. company to begin providing remittance wire services to Cuba. None of these steps represented a breakthrough in relations, but they did signal a retreat from Trump’s policy, which Biden had left intact during his first year in office.

Movement on Venezuela was more substantial. A shift away from Trump’s sanctions was foreshadowed in March 2022 when NSC Latin America director Juan Gonzalez, Roger Carstens, the special presidential envoy on hostage affairs, and Ambassador James Story traveled to Caracas to meet with President Nicolás Maduro.³⁴ The U.S. officials suggested that Washington would relax sanctions if Maduro would resume negotiations with a coalition of opposition groups. The ensuing dialogue between Washington and Caracas led to the October release of seven imprisoned Americans in exchange for two members of Maduro’s family imprisoned in the United States. Just a few weeks later, the Venezuelan government and opposition resumed talks in Mexico with an agreement to use Venezuela’s assets frozen in foreign banks to fund

humanitarian assistance. Washington responded by giving Chevron permission to resume exporting Venezuelan oil to the United States.³⁵ (Of course, there was a strong dose of self-interest in the U.S. move since Venezuelan oil would help offset the Saudi and Russian plans to reduce production, driving up international prices.)

These changes in Biden's approach suggest that the rebuke he suffered at the Summit of the Americas catalyzed some rethinking of a policy that, up until then, was hardly distinguishable from Donald Trump's. In the case of Cuba, at least, it's still a far cry from Obama's embrace of normalization, including his call for Congress to lift the embargo.

Although a full return to constructive engagement may have to wait for a future U.S. president, in the meantime the United States and Cuba can nevertheless forge a broad range of ties that serve the interests of both countries. During the half century of hostility preceding Obama's opening, the two governments engaged in extensive diplomatic discussions across a wide range of subjects from peace in southern Africa to prisoner exchanges and cooperation on issues of mutual interest. Although cooperation largely ceased during the Trump administration, Obama's policy left a legacy of 23 bilateral agreements—a framework upon which cooperation could be rebuilt.

Beginning even limited re-engagement will require some confidence-building measures to restore trust. Cuba's attitude toward engagement has remained fundamentally unchanged over the past two decades: Cuba seeks a relationship of mutual respect and recognition of its sovereignty, cooperation on issues of mutual interest, and an end to U.S. policies aimed at regime change—i.e., the embargo and “democracy promotion” programs funding regime opponents. In that same period, U.S. policy has swung wildly, from President George W. Bush's intense hostility to Obama's attempt at normalization, back to hostility under Trump, and finally to Biden's incoherent policy of maintaining some of Trump's sanctions while nominally reducing others. *The Hill* asked Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez whether, with such an unreliable partner, Cuba could “ever negotiate anything with America ever again after this?”

“We will have to,” Rodríguez replied, recognizing that perpetual hostility does not serve the interests of either country.³⁶

One way forward is for each side to take some limited actions, either in concert or as “parallel positive steps” also known as “reciprocal unilateral measures,” to borrow a concept from arms control negotiations. These are not concessions per se, but gestures that improve the atmosphere for diplomatic dialogue while at the same time serving the interests of the country taking the action.

What Can the United States Do?

This is by no means an exhaustive list of initiatives that Washington could take, but rather “low hanging fruit”—actions that would significantly improve the diplomatic atmosphere while at the same time serving U.S. interests.

(1) Take Cuba off the state sponsors of terrorism list. Cuban behavior does not fit the statutory definition of state sponsors of international terrorism, as the intelligence community determined when Obama took Cuba off the list in 2015. Keeping Cuba on the list makes a mockery of U.S. counter-terrorism policy. Cuba regards the designation deeply insulting and a serious obstacle to diplomatic progress. The ostensible reason for putting Cuba back on the list in 2021 was that Cuba refused to extradite ELN negotiators to Colombia after the peace negotiations in Havana

broke down. President Gustavo Petro of Colombia has resumed those talks and called Cuba's inclusion on the terrorism list "an injustice."³⁷

(2) Abolish the Prohibited Accommodations List. The list prevents U.S. visitors from staying in most Cuban hotels and blocks major U.S. travel providers from resuming people-to-people travel, despite the administration's nominal restoration of that travel category. The ostensible reason for the list is to prevent increased travel from benefiting the Cuban government, but by severely limiting the number of U.S. visitors, it also it also cripples the development of Cuba's private sector, much of which serves the tourist market.

(3) Suspend Title III of the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act. Allowing former property owners to sue Cuban, U.S., and foreign companies in U.S. courts represents an extraterritorial extension of U.S. sanctions that is an affront to the sovereignty of Cuba and of U.S. allies in both Europe and the Americas. By raising the risk of litigation attendant upon any commercial transaction with Cuba, it deters trade and investment not only with the state sector of the Cuban economy but the private sector as well.

What Can Cuba Do?

To state the obvious, Cuba does not have any economic sanctions against the United States that it can relax as reciprocal gestures, but there are things it can do to improve the diplomatic atmosphere.

(1) Offer its good offices in support of the renewed dialogue between the Venezuelan government and opposition. As an ally of the Venezuelan government, Cuba can have considerable influence over the search for a fair settlement. Cuba has a long history of contributing to diplomatic settlements of armed conflicts. It participated in the talks that ended the war between Angola and South Africa in the 1980s, supported the peace agreements in Central America in the 1990s, and, in partnership with Norway, helped mediate the Colombian peace accord negotiated in Havana in 2016. Cuban officials have indicated on several occasions that Cuba would support a negotiated settlement in Venezuela acceptable to the parties and supported by the United States, and Cuba played a key role in the 2019 negotiations, hosting initial conversations between the Maduro government and opposition.

(2) Allow Alina López Miyares to return to the United States. Convicted in Cuba of espionage, Ms. López Miyares served five years in prison and was given conditional release in July 2022. Allowing her to return to her family in the United States would be a generous humanitarian gesture for a woman who was caught up in a web of intrigue not of her own making. In 2013, René González of the Cuban Five faced a similar situation on parole in the United States, and was allowed to return to Cuba.

(3) Extend clemency to demonstrators convicted of non-violent offenses in connection with July 11, 2021, and recent protests over electrical blackouts. President Biden's longstanding support for international human rights makes the sentences given to several hundred 11J protestors a major stumbling block to significant bilateral progress. Concerns about the severity of some sentences was by no means exclusive to the United States. The European Union, which includes some of Cuba's main trade partners and tourism markets, expressed its "deep concern."³⁸ The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed her concerns about the arrests as well.³⁹

Pope Francis, who voiced his concern for the Cuban people amidst the turmoil of July 11, was an important supporter of reconciliation between Cuba and the United States in 2014, and remains so today. In the past, Cuba has given clemency to large numbers of prisoners out of respect for the Pope. Moreover, there are precedents for Cuba to release people imprisoned for politically motivated offenses in order to facilitate international reconciliation. In 2010, President Raúl Castro released 52 prisoners as part of a dialogue with the Catholic Church and government of Spain—a gesture that smoothed the way for the EU to move from the Common Position to the Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement.⁴⁰ In December 2014, Cuba released 53 prisoners as a humanitarian gesture in conjunction with the beginning of the process of normalizing relations with the United States. Cuba has already reduced the sentences of some juveniles convicted of offenses on July 11 and 12, 2021, so clemency in these cases has precedent.⁴¹

Cuba and the United States have conducted similar minuets of confidence-building in the past, to good effect. Even when they have not led to major diplomatic breakthroughs, they have made possible policy changes that serve the interest of both governments and, most importantly, of the people of both countries.

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² **Error! Main Document Only.** U.S. Senate Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and other Internal Security Laws, Committee of the Judiciary, Communist Threat to the United States Through the Caribbean, Part 9 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1960): 700.

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