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Title: "The Death of Bipartisanship in Creating Positive Alternatives in US- Cuban Relations"

In 2018 the entire Minnesota Congressional delegation, seven Democrats and three Republicans had taken public positions in opposition to the US blockade/embargo. That fall in Minneapolis the annual meeting of the National Network on Cuba began with written greetings from Republican representative and co-chair of the Cuba Working Group, Tom Emmer. Five years later that bipartisanship for engagement with Cuba has been almost completely reversed. The six Democrats in the current delegation remain publicly committed to ending the embargo but none of the four Republicans, including Emmer have embraced positive positions on Cuba. This paper will analyze the factors behind that shift and how it has been reflected in national politics on Cuba. Primary focus will be on the embracing of the Cuban rightwing by candidate Donald Trump and his subsequent rise to dominance in the Republican Party. Attention will also be paid to the reaction in Republican policy making circles to the Obama opening which it almost universally condemned and how that allowed the leaders of the Republican Party to isolate those Republicans who supported Obama's opening.

Advocacy of policies favoring engagement with the revolutionary government of Cuba have not always been associated primarily with the Democratic Party. Following the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959 and the subsequent realization in Washington of the radical nature of the Revolution a bipartisan consensus developed that the government in Havana had to be removed from power. The embargo against the island began in the final stages of the Eisenhower administration as did the CIA's plans for armed intervention that were carried out by Kennedy administration, including at the Bay of Pigs in 1961. The hostility of the Kennedy administration reached its zenith during the October Crisis in 1962 but also included numerous efforts to assassinate Cuban leaders, including Fidel Castro. Diplomatically the Kennedy administration worked hard to isolate Cuba, including the suspension of its membership in the Organization of American States and a complete break in formal diplomatic relations between the two countries. In the context of the Cold War and Cuba's promotion of revolutionary groups throughout the Americas in the 1960s most countries in the hemisphere, with the exception of Mexico joined in terminating economic and political relations with the island. European nations also largely followed the U.S. lead and either ended or severely restricted their economic relations with Cuba, leaving Cuba's economic relations in the 1960s onward to be limited to the Soviet Union and its socialist allies.

Lyndon Johnson continued the hardline policies toward Cuba that he inherited from Eisenhower and Kennedy and during his tenure in office he signed the Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966 that granted special

privileges to Cubans leaving the island on the basis that the alleged repressive character made such migrants automatically eligible to apply for asylum, a law that remains in place today. That Congressional action, which passed with almost no dissent, demonstrated that there was also bipartisan support for a hardline policy in Congress. The assumption of power by Republican Richard Nixon in 1969 with no change in policy demonstrated that the position of non-engagement with the Cuban government was becoming a clearly bipartisan position that was also well supported in the policy making circles in the Department of State and Department of Defense. An easy acceptance of the status quo on Cuba was bolstered by the continuance of the Cold War and the close relations that Cuba had with the USSR.

The Nixon and subsequent Ford administrations ultimately showed that engagement with Cuba could come from a Republican administration. It is well documented in *Back Channel to Cuba: Hidden History of Negotiations Between Washington and Havana*, authored by William Leogrande and Peter Kornbluh that Henry Kissinger, Secretary of State from 1973-1977 under both Nixon and Ford initiated secret negotiations with officials of the Cuban government in 1974 seeking to end what Kissinger called 'perpetual state of hostility' between the two countries. Kissinger's outlook was motivated by a long-standing worldview that the United States as the dominant power in the world could best defend its interests by moderating the revolutionary instincts of its adversaries. By 1974 he had successfully pursued that strategy with the Peoples Republic of China and the Soviet Union and was hopeful that it could be pursued with revolutionary Cuba. Several meetings were held in New York City and other locations around the world and some of the meetings included business executives, including Coca-Cola that were eager to do business in Cuba. This desire from U.S. business interests, usually linked more to the Republican Party than the Democrats has always been a factor in creating potentially bi-partisan support for engagement with Cuba. One tangible result of the negotiations was a tweaking of the embargo to allow subsidiaries of US companies in third countries to do business with the island. Over the years that followed that loophole created a small window of commerce into the capitalist world for Cuba and for US companies to indirectly profit. However, the hopes for a significant breakthrough in US-Cuban relations were dashed at the end of 1975 when Cuba, acting against the advice of the USSR, sent troops to Angola to defend their newly won independence from troops of apartheid South Africa and right-wing rebels supported by the US government against the socialist leadership of Angola. This action by Cuba terminated the talks and actually led Kissinger the following year to propose a bombing campaign of the island to force Cuba to remove its troops from Angola. The Ford administration rejected the proposal at least until after the 1976 election which Ford would lose.

Henry Kissinger, acting for a Republican administration, showed there could be an attempt to engage Cuba from that side of the political aisle but it would be President Jimmy Carter and his initiatives that would begin to place the Democratic Party more as the locus of a politics of engagement a locus that has remained strong down to the present time, most embodied in President Barak Obama's 2014 opening. President Carter entered the White House in 1977 committed to a more progressive US policy in Latin America as a whole with Cuba as an important priority. Soon after taking office Carter and Cuban President Fidel Castro agreed to the upgrading of their diplomatic relations to the level of interest sections, reopening their long-shuttered embassy buildings in Havana and Washington. In the process the two countries began a dialogue on a wide range of issues. From the US side Carter used his executive authority to eliminate all restrictions on US travel to the island and within two years more than 100,000 US citizens were traveling to the island, primarily Cuban Americans but also regular tourists enjoying Cuba's beaches. It was the intent of both sides to eliminate the US commercial embargo but before significant progress could be made on that front world events intervened to undermine the opening. Cuba continued its military involvement in both Ethiopia and Angola and that

fact alarmed hardliners in the administration when Cuba signaled that its involvement there was not negotiable. Events in Central America also played a role. Cuban support for the Nicaraguan revolution and guerillas fighting the governments of El Salvador and Guatemala served to place US-Cuban relations in a clear Cold War context and made moving the relationship forward almost impossible in the final two years of the Carter administration. When Carter lost his reelection bid in 1980 the momentum was clearly gone even though the restored diplomatic relations were maintained, and US citizens continued to travel legally to the island. Carter as a private citizen never gave up his hope for engagement with Cuba and it was a priority for the Carter Center in Atlanta. Carter made two high profile visits to Cuba in 2002 and 2011 to promote his vision of engagement, the first US president to visit the island after Calvin Coolidge in 1928. In 2002 he gave a speech, in Spanish, directly to the Cuban people calling for the US to end its blockade of Cuba while calling on the Cuban government to respect the civil and political rights of its population. His 2011 visit came as behind the scenes the Obama administration was considering its eventual opening.

The arrival of Republican Ronald Reagan to the presidency in 1981 was an important moment in the trajectory of US domestic politics on the question of engagement with Cuba given that in the previous three administrations, two Republican and one Democratic there had been efforts to engage Cuba seeming to indicate that there was not necessarily a partisan spin on the question and that either party given the right set of circumstances was willing to engage with Cuba if it was seen as meeting US national interests. There is probably some justification for that analysis, even today, but the Reagan years set in motion a process in the Republican Party that moved the party leadership, especially at the national level away from a pro-engagement position that had been glimpsed under Nixon and Ford based on business sector actors. Taking a hard line on Cuba came easy for the hardline anti-Communist who had campaigned against Carter as being soft on communism, especially in Latin America. Attacking Cuba's ally the Sandinistas of Nicaragua became a centerpiece of Reagan anti-communist policies ruling out categorically any engagement with Cuba. However, of more long-term meaning was the development of a partisan political leaning in the Cuban American community, especially in Florida, on behalf of the Republican Party. Prior to the linkage of the Republican Party to that community virtually all Latino migrant communities, especially Mexicans and Puerto Ricans, gave their votes to the Democratic Party. However, given the generally higher socio-economic profile and Catholic character of the Cuban community the Republican Party saw an opening. In 1981 the Cuban American National Foundation, the leadership of businessman, Jorge Mas Canosa, was formed for the express purpose of steering Cuban American votes to the Republican Party on the basis of a pro-business stance, social conservatism, a policy of non-engagement on Cuba, and support for anti-Cuban government programs like Radio Marti. Over the next thirty years this project, modeled after the Israeli lobby, AIPAC, was incredibly successful. First and foremost, it delivered Cuban American votes in the general range of 70-75% to Republican candidates both in Florida and nationally. The solid Republican Cuban American vote in Florida was significant in the narrow electoral victory of George W. Bush in 2000. Through generous campaign contributions to selected Democratic candidates in Florida and New Jersey the Foundation was also able get Democrat office holders to take anti-engagement stances in contradiction to a Democratic Party mainstream that from Jimmy Carter forward moved to favor engagement. These anti-engagement Democratic votes in Congress, though relatively small in number, have often been sufficient to maintain the embargo.

The collapse of East European socialism and ultimately the Soviet Union itself during the administration of George H. W. Bush caused an unprecedented economic crisis in Cuba and roiled the question of how the United States should respond. The Cuban American National Foundation and powerful allies in the Republican Party and the foreign policymaking establishment as a whole saw the crisis in Cuba as an opportunity to promote regime change by tightening the blockade on Cuba. Pro-engagement forces saw

it as an opportunity to engage the Cuban government and potentially gain concessions but CANF and its allies definitely had the upper hand and ultimately succeeded in passing in 1992 the Cuban Democracy Act that ended third party sales by US subsidiaries and tied an end to the embargo to pro-US political change on the island. As the Bush administration departed the scene in 1993 the Republican hardline on Cuba was clearly triumphant with CANF leading the way.

The arrival of the Clinton administration brought the Democrats back to the White House and the possibility of pro-engagement tactics harkening back to the Carter years in play. However, Clinton's first term saw exactly the opposite direction as anti-engagement forces maintained the upper hand, culminating in Clinton's signature on the Republican inspired Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act in 1996 (also known as Helms-Burton). The legislation further tightened the blockade with key provisions aimed at preventing other countries from doing business with Cuba and most importantly placed full control of the blockade in the hands of Congress where a bipartisan coalition of anti-engagement forces has kept the blockade in place up to this day.

Clinton's second term produced far more interesting developments in US-Cuban relations. Freed from running for reelection Clinton changed gears and moved into the camp of Jimmy Carter and pressure on Cuba through engagement. President Clinton announced several policy changes including the resumption of direct charter flights and cash remittances that were popular even with many conservative Cuban Americans. He also changed the travel rules to allow US undergraduate students to study on the island. Previously only professorial and graduate student research had been permitted. Many universities, including my own, initiated both short term and semester programs. Twenty-five years later many of those courses remain in place. In January 1999 while I was in Cuba with my first student group Clinton announced several additional actions including more direct flights, broadening of permissible cash remittances, expanding people to people travel beyond student groups, and most significantly authorizing the sale of food and agricultural inputs to independent entities in Cuba. With these actions Clinton clearly placed himself and the Democratic Party in the pro-engagement camp. This was done in the hope of weaning some Cuban Americans away from the hardliners in the Republican Party who generally opposed these measures even though they helped the families of Cuban Americans living on the island.

The 106<sup>th</sup> Congress, the final one of the Clinton administrations turned out to be a historic one for US-Cuban relations and for bipartisan cooperation that supported the pro-engagement position. Led by Republican senators from Midwest agricultural states the FY 2001 agriculture appropriations bill included a provision to allow the sale of products directly to the Cuban government as long as no US assistance or financing is provided by any US entity. In other words, the Cuban government would need to pay in cash. The bill PL 106-387 was co-sponsored by Christopher Dodd (D-CT) and Mark Warner (R-VA) also codified existing embargo regulations that prohibited the importation of products from Cuba and travel for tourism. The appropriation passed by a vote of 86-8, obviously bipartisan support. However, given the stipulations placed on the law by the anti-engagement forces it was a limited victory but it did show the legislation on Cuba favoring American business (farmers) could win support from within the Republican Party. Many normally anti-engagement members of Congress may have voted for it not expecting that it would lead to actual sales given the cash requirement. Farm state Republicans voted for it because their farming constituency generally opposes any legislation that prevents them from accessing international markets. However, that position does not lead to support for a complete ending the embargo which would allow for Cuba to sell its products in the United States. Cuba did not initially purchase US agricultural products but following a major hurricane in 2003 sales began and grew very quickly to more than \$750 million in 2007, making Cuba, a small country in the top 25 in the world in sales volume. Sales came from both major US agricultural producers and from small scale Black farmers in the South. Since its peak in 2007

sales have fluctuated in part because of Cuba's economic situation but even in today's dire times for the Cuban economy sales total more than \$300 million annually. The continued existence of the Dodd/Warner legislation with no serious efforts to repeal show that a bipartisan coalition could be constructed for a project that was seen as primarily benefitting US farmers who would be shut out of sales that would simply go to another agricultural producer, like Brazil who is Cuba's biggest source of agricultural products. Keeping that coalition together for broader engagement with Cuba proved to be very difficult especially as another Bush won the White House in 2000 with strong backing from conservative Cuban Americans wanting a reversal of the engagement trends of the second Clinton administration.

In his first term in office even he responded to the 9/11/2001 events and prosecuted wars in Iraq and Afghanistan George Bush, in part owing his narrow victory to Cuban American support in Florida, moved to reverse many of Clinton's executive orders, limiting remittances, travel (even Cuban Americans), and student courses. His administration issued a report under the name of Colin Powell that detailed the US government's plans for regime change. Only limited diplomatic relations were maintained alongside significant US agriculture sales permitted under Dodd/Warner. Throughout Bush's eight years the bipartisan coalition of anti-engagement forces remained dominant in Congress even as a limited number of farm state Republicans maintained a pro-engagement position and support for engagement continued to grow within the Democratic members of Congress.

Barack Obama's assumption of the presidency was accompanied by expectations that he would return US foreign policy toward Cuba to a pro-engagement position matching that of his Democratic predecessors, Carter and Clinton. In his first term he largely fulfilled those expectations by returning to Clinton era rules on remittances, travel, and university courses. More consistent engagement with Cuban officials returned, including cooperation on drug trafficking. During his first term pressure was also building for him to go beyond the actions of his Democratic predecessors and move to full diplomatic relations and the end of the blockade. There was hope for such action because Obama spoke of the need to engage America's adversaries, including robust efforts to achieve a nuclear deal with Iran and to engage China as a potential partner on issues like climate change. We now know that Obama was seeking a new relationship with Cuba and those efforts came to fruition in his second term with the dramatic announcements of December 17, 2014, by Obama and his Cuban counterpart, Raul Castro.

After months of secret negotiations that are well documented by Leogrande and Kornbluh, the two governments announced that full diplomatic relations would be restored and Obama committed to working to end the blockade, an action that would require Congressional action. In his final two years in office the Obama administration oversaw unprecedented thawing of the relations between the two countries. The two sides negotiated 22 agreements on issues ranging from law enforcement to the environment. Full diplomatic relations were reestablished, and Obama became the first sitting president since Coolidge to visit the island and gave a broadcast speech directly to the Cuban people. Obama issued many executive orders to loosen the embargo, including the establishment of direct airline flights and cruise ships. Licenses for US companies to do business in Cuba on a limited basis were approved. The US Chamber of Commerce, usually associated more with the Republican Party launched the US-Cuba Business Council representing two dozen major corporations. The bipartisan US Agriculture Coalition for Cuba, composed of over 100 farm bureaus lobbied for the end to financing restrictions on US exports to Cuba. By January 2016 over 40 US companies, including all major airlines and telecommunication companies had signed new commercial agreements with Havana. In a very significant step Cuba was removed from the State Sponsors of Terrorism (SSOT), an act that made it easier for Cuba to access the international financial system and the US suspended its program seeking to get Cuban doctors working abroad to defect to the United States.

However, in Congress the bipartisan anti-engagement coalition held together and prevented legislative action to repeal the Torricelli and Helms-Burton laws. This reality underscored that except for a few exceptions like the Minnesota Republicans mentioned at the beginning of this paper the leadership of the Republican Party did not embrace Obama's opening to Cuba and that reality would become clear when the party regained the White House in 2016.

It is important to document the Republican thinking on Cuba in the wake of the Obama opening to fully understand the current political environment. To do so the focus will be on two staunchly Republican think tanks, the American Enterprise Institute and the Heritage Foundation and their Cuba postings between 2014 and 2016. On December 18, 2014, Karlyn Bowman published a short piece on the AEI website entitled 'Cuba the Morning After'. Bowman did not articulate a formal position on the previous day's announcement but instead referred the readers to a fourteen-year-old AEI book by conservative scholar, Marc Falcoff entitled "Cuba the Morning After: Confronting Castro's Legacy" the details his views of long-term damage of Communist rule and little hope for the future. She also referred readers to a recent piece by Roger Noriega questioning the value of engagement. The position of AEI became clearer in the summer of 2015 when it published John Bolton's article, "Obama's Outrageous Cuba Capitulations". Bolton, one of the architects of the Iraq War under George W. Bush, would later become National Security advisor to the Trump administration. He outlines the primary argument that the anti-engagement forces would make up to this day, that Obama made major concessions to Cuba without getting anything tangible in return and only prolonged the hold of the Communist government. This perspective has long maintained that maximum pressure will eventually turn the Cuban people against their government and provide an opportunity for US intervention. He ends with saying that reversal of the policy of engagement by the next president should be a priority. Ironically, Trump's election in 2016 gave Bolton the opportunity to be part of that reversal. Also, of import was AEI's publication in February 2017 of Roger Noriega's article "Cuba is Stifling International Dialogue on Human Rights". The focus of the article is Cuba's refusal to allow the visit of an OAS human rights observer group but the timing of its publication and Noriega's long association with the anti-engagement position is more important. It was the first days of the Trump administration and before he announced in June 2017 a reversal of Obama's policies. In Republican think tank circles the AEI was not alone in voicing a clear opposition to Obama's opening. In August 2015 the Heritage Foundation published a commentary by Ana Rosa Quintana, who served in the Bush administration, arguing that the resumption of full diplomatic relations with Cuba was "a false step by the Obama administration the undermined US credibility and the cause of freedom on the island". As the Heritage Foundation's analyst for Latin America, she argues Cuba's political system is out of step with the democratic nations of the Hemisphere and that US engagement will not change that fact. She also makes the case that violations of religious freedom on the island have increased in recent years and will not be improved by engagement. She also underscores John Bolton's argument that the United States made many concessions to Cuba and did not receive any in return.

The final piece of the puzzle was what position President Donald Trump would take once in office. Early in his 2016 campaign he offered that he as not opposed to the opening to Cuba but argued that Obama could have gotten a better deal. This ambivalence was underscored by the fact that representatives of the Trump hotel corporation had visited Cuba during the Obama opening to explore commercial possibilities. Cuba watchers speculated that as a businessperson he might side with the pro-engagement forces within the Republican Party that saw Cuba as an important commercial opportunity. However, that thought evaporated late in the campaign when Trump visited Florida and met with the hardline Cuban American Republicans and fully adopted their talking points. Those positions became US policy when Trump went to Little Havana in Miami in June 2017 and announced that he was fully reversing Obama's

Cuba opening. In reality his policies would fall short of full reversal as diplomatic relations were not broken, regular air flights were maintained, and the 22 bilateral agreements were not abrogated. However, many of Obama's policies were reversed and some new measures were added. Cruise ships were banned, remittances were restricted, the program of encouraging Cuban doctor defections was revived, and in the final days of his administration Cuba was again placed on the SSOT.

Additionally, Trump became the first US president to allow US companies and individuals to sue the Cuban government under the Helms-Burton Law to recover properties from the pre-revolutionary era.

The details of his Cuba policy were largely outsourced to anti-engagement Cuban American members of Congress and selective high level appointees like Mauricio Claver-Carone to the National Security Council. By the end of the Trump presidency the anti-engagement position was firmly established within the Republican Party. Business groups like the Chamber of Commerce had stepped into the background and Trump's personal connection to the anti-engagement position as head of the party as it moved into opposition seemed to carry the day with little room for dissent.

The return to the White House of the Democratic Party with Joe Biden is not the major focus of this paper but it has been an interesting three years of Cuba policy. With a changed administration the Republican Cuban Americans were no longer at the center of policy decisions but in many ways, there has been continuity with their policies. Some policies were nuanced. Remittance restrictions were loosened but not eliminated, more charter flights were added, and the two sides resumed negotiations on migration issues. However, cruise travel was not reinstated, encouragement doctor defections continue, and most importantly Cuba has been maintained on the SSOT. The latter has been especially important because it has impeded Cuba's recovery from the COVID crisis which devastated their tourist economy.

The engagement wing of the Democratic Party has remained strong. In 2021 119 Democratic members of Congress urged Biden to return to all of Obama's policies as he had promised during his campaign and by the end of 2023 more than 50 Democrat- lead cities, including New York, Chicago, Washington DC, Detroit, Minneapolis, St. Paul, and Boston passed resolutions with the same request. In none of those cities were their Republican votes for the pro-engagement position.

As this paper has shown, the primary impetus in US politics for a pro-engagement position on Cuba has come primarily from the Democratic Party going back to the 1977 initiative of President Jimmy Carter.

All of his Democratic successors from Clinton to Obama to Biden have pursued some form of engagement and within the wider Democratic Party, especially its progressive wing the pro-engagement sentiment is well entrenched. Republican support for the pro-engagement position has been much more limited, primarily coming from farm state Republicans, like my state of Minnesota, where Cuba is seen primarily as a significant market for US agricultural products. As demonstrated, support was crucial to the passage of the Dodd/ Warner legislation of 2001. However, once that channel was established and maintained to this day there is very little Republican support for moving to a complete elimination of the embargo/blockade. More research is needed on today's Republican Party but as long as it remains the party of Donald Trump there seems little likelihood that there will be any serious numbers of defections to the pro-engagement position. If there is a change in the Republican Party that brings it back closer to its traditional representation of financial and business interests then the hold on party policy by the conservative Cuban Americans could be loosened.

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