

## US-Cuba Relations

February 1990

Background: US-Cuban relations deteriorated sharply following Fidel Castro's assumption of power in 1959. This development resulted in part from Castro's imposition of a repressive dictatorship and his government's efforts to destabilize democratic governments in neighboring countries. The US broke diplomatic relations in 1961 and imposed an embargo on trade and financial relations in 1962. The embargo was prompted by the seizure, without compensation, of US private property in Cuba and was set up to deny the Castro government access to US dollars and goods and services.

Attempts to renew relations: Talks were conducted between US and Cuban representatives in the mid-1970s, but were halted when Cuba intervened in Angola. In 1977, "interests sections" were established in the two capitals: the US section in the Swiss Embassy in Havana and the Cuban section in the Czechoslovak Embassy in Washington, D.C.

The dialogue begun in 1977 did not prosper because Cuba remained unwilling to compromise on issues of importance to the US. Cuban military intervention in Africa, increasing Cuban subversion in the Caribbean Basin, continuing Cuban dependence on the USSR and its arms, and the Mariel boatlift--which was an assault on US sovereignty--destroyed prospects for better bilateral relations.

Status of relationship: Four key elements of our relationship are:

- Absence of normal diplomatic relations. The interests sections provide a line of communication between our two governments, but their existence does not constitute normal diplomatic relations. Legally, the US is represented in Havana by the Swiss ambassador.
- Economic embargo. The embargo prohibits transactions between persons subject to US jurisdiction and Cuba or its nationals, unless authorized by the Treasury Department. Except for informational materials, no Cuban goods or products with Cuban content may enter the US, nor may US goods be exported to Cuba. The Department of Commerce can license the export to Cuba of small gift parcels and has on occasion licensed the export of critical medical equipment unavailable to Cuba from other sources.
- Travel restrictions. Travel to Cuba by persons subject to US jurisdiction is not prohibited, but travel-related transactions, such as buying airline tickets or meals in Cuba, must be licensed by the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC). Treasury does not license such transactions for tourism or business purposes, but it has issued general licenses for full-time journalists on assignment, government employees on official business, persons traveling to visit relatives in Cuba, and certain researchers engaging in Cuba-specific research. Persons desiring to travel to Cuba should contact OFAC for information (202-376-0922).

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- Migration. The 1984 US-Cuban Migration Agreement was reinstated in 1987 and has permitted more than 11,000 Cuban immigrants and ex-political prisoners to immigrate to the US. Cuba had suspended the agreement in 1985, when the Voice of America's Radio Marti began broadcasting to Cuba. The agreement normalized Cuban emigration to the US and provided for the return to Cuba of criminals and others excludable under US immigration law who had arrived during the 1980 Mariel boatlift.

Impediments to better relations: Three major impediments to better bilateral relations remain:

- Support for subversion abroad. Cuba supports antidemocratic, violent groups with arms, training, and guidance. Secretary Baker told the Organization of American States in November 1989 that shipments of arms and supplies through Cuba to the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) rebels in El Salvador "support violence, destruction, and war" in the region. In 1989, a major FMLN weapons cache that included more than 300,000 rounds of Cuban ammunition was discovered in downtown San Salvador.
- Internal repression. The Cuban Government cracked down on the human rights movement during 1989 and arrested most of the prominent dissidents in Cuba. President Castro denounced reforms sweeping through the USSR and Eastern Europe and continues to deny the Cuban people basic freedoms.
- Soviet connection. The Soviet-Cuban relationship remains intact, although strains are appearing between the two countries. The Soviet 2,800-man motorized rifle brigade remains in Cuba; the Soviets have an intelligence collection facility there targeted at US communications; and the USSR supplies Cuba with more than \$5.5 billion yearly in economic and military assistance, including advanced MiG-29 aircraft in 1989.

Outlook: US policy results from the Cuban Government's unacceptable behavior at home and abroad. As long as this behavior continues and Fidel Castro remains hostile toward the US, overall relations are unlikely to improve. Two positive developments: the Cubans are withdrawing their 50,000 troops from Angola under the timetable set forth in the 1988 Angola-Namibia accords, and they also pulled their forces out of Ethiopia during 1989. Troop withdrawal from Africa by itself, however, will not lead to an overall improvement.

Thirty years of strained relations have not precluded cooperating on issues of interest to both countries as geographic neighbors, such as migration and search and rescue, but prospects appear poor for cooperation on matters such as narcotics and regional security.