BROKEN ENGAGEMENT: PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP’S RETREAT FROM NORMALIZATION

William M. LeoGrande

INTRODUCTION

In the two years of Barack Obama’s presidency following December 17, 2014, the United States and Cuba made rapid diplomatic progress, reestablishing full diplomatic relations, creating a series of working groups to build cooperation on issues of mutual interest, and signing some two dozen bilateral agreements. Travel, trade, and cultural exchanges expanded as these former adversaries gradually developed a measure of trust. The results seemed to confirm that the interests of both countries were best served by engagement, and strengthened constituencies favoring engagement in both capitals. Then the unexpected election of Donald J. Trump as the 45th president of the United States threw everything into doubt.

THE 2016 US PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

Donald Trump expressed contradictory views about Cuba during the 2016 presidential campaign. At first, he supported engagement, saying, “Fifty years is enough. The concept of opening with Cuba is fine,” though he added, “I think we should have made a stronger deal” (Mazzei, 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, 2016). In the campaign's final weeks, however, the Republican ticket focused on energizing its base, including conservative Cuban Americans in Florida. 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” (Diamond, 2016).
In the end, Trump's appeal to Cuban American voters had limited success. He won 52-54% 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 and Nehamas, 2016). Yet Trump seemed to think he owed Cuban Americans a political debt. When Fidel Castro died on November 26, 2016, President-Elect Trump condemned the Cuban leader and promised Cuban Americans he would work for a free Cuba. "Fidel Castro's legacy is one of firing squads, theft, unimaginable suffering, poverty and the denial of fundamental human rights," Trump wrote. "I join the many Cubans 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 US as a whole, I will terminate deal" (Mazzei, 2016).

Cuban officials scrupulously refrained from commenting on the US presidential campaign while it was underway, simply saying that they hoped whoever won would carry out the will of the American people, who were overwhelmingly in favor of normalization (Gómez, 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. The message to Washington was clear: Havana was ready to continue the diplomatic dialogue but was prepared to defend itself if necessary.

A few days after Trump's inauguration, Raúl Castro, reiterated Cuba's longstanding position, "I wish to express Cuba's willingness to continue negotiating pending bilateral issues with the United States, on the basis of equality, reciprocity and respect for the sovereignty and independence of our country, and continue the respectful dialogue and cooperation on issues of common interest with the new government of President Donald Trump." he said. "Cuba and the United States can cooperate and coexist in a civilized manner, respecting differences and promoting all that benefits both countries and peoples, but it should not be expected that to do so Cuba will make concessions inherent to its sovereignty and independence" (Castro, 2017).

IN SEARCH OF A POLICY

During the first five months of the Trump administration, supporters of the policy of engagement waged an uphill fight to preserve as much of Obama's policy as possible (Kornbluh, 2017). They had to battle Trump's conviction that he owed his election victory in Florida to hardline Cuban Americans; his determination to keep his campaign pledge to "reverse" Obama's opening to Cuba; and his desire to demolish Obama's legacy, of which Cuba stood as among the most prominent foreign policy achievements.

By mobilizing the constituencies that benefited from normalization — especially the business community— supporters of engagement hoped to counter Trump's hardline instincts through unrelenting political pressure. On the other side, pushing Trump to roll back Obama's policy completely, were the two most vocal and dogged congressional critics of engagement, Rep. Mario Díaz-Balart (R-Fla.) and Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.). They presented themselves as spokesmen for the exile community and waged a relentless campaign behind the scenes to convince the president that he had to make good on his campaign promise to "terminate the deal".

The new administration's first step on Cuba, in February, was to launch a "full review" of policy. Pending the outcome of that review, the administration suspended all the bilateral talks except for those related to migration, which were mandated by the 1994 US-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 the administration was embroiled in a protracted battle over what its new Cuba policy should be (Hirschfeld Davis, 2017).

From January 20, 2017 until the president announced his Cuba policy in Miami on June 16, supporters of Obama's policy of engagement generated a constant stream of public appeals from a wide variety of constituencies to preserve the opening to Cuba. In April, 16 retired senior military officers, including a former commander of the Southern Command, sent National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster an open letter urging the administration to maintain engagement. "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). Seven Republican members of the House of Representatives sent Trump a letter echoing the national security argument: "Reversing course would incentivize Cuba to once again become dependent on countries like Russia and China," they wrote. "Allowing this to happen could have disastrous results for the security of the United States" (Marshall, 2017).
In May, after taking eight corporate executives to Cuba, 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." The following week, 46 travel companies signed a letter asking Trump not to tighten restrictions on travel. "US travelers to Cuba are the best ambassadors of American society. They interact and develop meaningful relationships with Cubans at all levels of society and promote US culture and economic interests," the companies argued (Engage Cuba, 2017a). Underscoring the theme, the day after the travel companies released their letter, Senators Jeff Flake (R-Ariz.) and Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) reintroduced their Freedom to Travel to Cuba bill with 55 senators cosponsoring.

By June, word had begun leaking to the press that the White House was contemplating a significant reversal of Obama’s policy (Hirschfeld Davis, 2017). Defenders of engagement stepped up the pressure, hoping to influence the debate inside the administration, which was reportedly heated. Engage Cuba, a coalition of business groups favoring trade, released an analysis concluding that US visitors to Cuba generated 1.65 billion dollars in revenue annually for US businesses and accounted for more than 12,000 US jobs, all of which could be lost if Trump reversed Obama’s opening. Notably, the US Chamber of Commerce signed the report (Zanona, 2017b). The US Agricultural Coalition for Cuba, composed of 81 national and state farm bureaus, and 36 agricultural corporations, sent Trump a letter urging him to support private financing of US agricultural sales to Cuba (IDPA, 2017). Three Republican Senators wrote to Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and National Security Adviser McMaster urging them not to sacrifice the economic and foreign policy the benefits of Obama’s policy (Marshall, 2017).

The leaders of ten conservative groups sent President Trump an open letter calling on him to expand commerce with Cuba rather than restrict it. "Establishing free trade with Cuba is not an endorsement of a communist dictatorship," they wrote. "Rather, restrictions on trade violate the rights of American citizens without any policy benefit" (Engage Cuba, 2017b). In the days leading up to June 16, Engage Cuba released a poll by Morning Consult (2017) showing that 65% of voters supported Obama’s Cuba policy and only 18% opposed it. Moreover, 64% of Republicans supported the opening and 55% supported lifting all restrictions on travel and trade.

Two moderate Cuban American Groups, the business-oriented Cuba Study Group and CubaOne, an organization of young Cuban Americans, both released statements supporting engagement. The Cuba Study Group (2017) noted that a majority of Cuban Americans favored normalizing relations with Havana. "Our unifying principle is a commitment to improving the lives of the Cuban people while advancing US interests. A policy of normalization is clearly a ‘better deal’ that does both," it argued. "To ignore the majority view of the Cuban-American community would be both a policy and political error," CubaOne (2017), in an open petition to the White House, argued that Obama’s opening had facilitated reconciliation between Cubans and Cuban Americans and asked the president not to do anything that would reinforce barriers between the two communities.

Finally, with the press reporting that Trump’s impending speech in Miami on Cuba policy would use Cuba’s human rights violations to justify reversing Obama’s policy, both Amnesty International (2017) and Human Rights Watch (2017), tough critics of the Cuban government, made public statements warning that a return to hostility would do more harm than good to the human rights situation. "For more than half a century, the embargo has imposed indiscriminate hardship on the Cuban population as a whole," Human Rights Watch wrote. "It has provided the Cuban government with an excuse for its problems, a pretext for its abuses, and a way to garner sympathy abroad."

WHISPERING IN THE PRESIDENT’S EAR

While the public effort to influence the White House unfolded, an intense battle was being fought inside the administration. Behind the scenes, Cuban American members of Congress, led by Marco Rubio and Mario Díaz-Balart, took advantage of every encounter they had with President Trump to lobby for a reversal of Obama’s Cuba policy, reminding the president of his campaign promises (Mazzei, 2017). They began as soon as the ballots were counted. According to Rubio, Trump was a sympathetic hardliner from the beginning. When Rubio called the president-elect in November to congratulate him on his victory, it was Trump who raised the Cuba issue. "We gotta figure out what to do about Cuba," Trump told his former rival. "The Bay of Pigs guys were great to me." At a time when the race in Florida looked close, the veterans’ organization of Bay of Pigs combatants had endorsed Trump. In return, he promised them he would reverse Obama’s policy. "He brings that up all the time," Díaz-Balart noted (Mazzei 2016a, 2017).

In February 2017, after Rubio and his wife had dinner with the president and Mrs. Trump, the president commented, "We had a very good discussion about Cuba because we have very similar views on Cuba," adding, "Cuba has been very good to me, in the Florida elections, you know, the Cuban people, Americans" (Gámez Torres, 2017).

That same month, Díaz-Balart and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.), the first Cuban American elected to Congress, raised the issue with Vice President Pence. The hardliners had an ally in Pence, whose comments on Cuba during the campaign
were tougher and less equivocal than Trump's. "When Donald Trump is president of the United States, we will repeal Obama's executive orders on Cuba," Pence promised while campaigning in Florida just days before the election. "We will support continuing the embargo until real political and religious freedoms are a reality for all the people of Cuba. Donald Trump will stand with freedom-loving Cubans in the fight against Communist oppression" (Weber, 2016).

Díaz-Balart wanted Trump to reverse almost everything Obama had done. He called it "the kitchen sink approach." A memo laying out his policy recommendations began, "The absolute top priority is reinstating regulations that were in place prior to President Obama's December 2014 announcement." In addition, he recommended that the president consider returning Cuba to list of state sponsors of international terrorism. He also proposed allowing Title III of the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act of 1996 (Helms-Burton) to go into effect, which would have clogged US courts with as many as 200 000 law suits by Cubans Americans who lost property after 1959, crippling the prospects for US business with the island, and infringing allies whose companies in Cuba would be subject to litigation.

Díaz-Balart shared his memo with Florida Governor Rick Scott, who then handed it to President Trump on March 3, on the limousine ride from Air Force One to an event in Orlando. Scott urged the president to focus on the issue of human rights in Cuba. Senator Rubio, who had flown to Orlando with Trump, pushed for tighter restrictions on travel and transactions involving Cuban firms run by the armed forces. "Can you guys put something together and bring it to us?" Trump asked (Caputo, 2017).

They did, and in mid-March, Díaz-Balart sent a letter with recommendations to the White House cosigned by two other south Florida Cuban American legislators, Carlos Curbelo (R-Fla.) and Ros-Lehtinen. It called for freezing the general licenses for trade and travel that Obama had put in place, banning transactions with any Cuban enterprise linked to the armed forces (an idea that both Díaz-Balart and Rubio had proposed as legislation in 2014 and 2015), and eliminating non-academic educational travel (the people-to-people category), as President George W. Bush had done in 2005, only to have Obama restore it in 2011 (Caputo, 2017).

The Republican effort in March to repeal and replace Obama care gave Diaz-Balart another opportunity to pressure the White House to repeal Obama's Cuba policy. Diaz-Balart represented a swing vote on the American Health Care Act and he raised the Cuba issue when the White House sought his support. He denied that he sought or received an explicit promise on Cuba in exchange for his vote (he supported the bill), but he did not deny using the opportunity to emphasize how important the Cuba issue was to him (Mazzei and Gámez Torres, 2017). "I will never waste an opportunity to fight for the interests of our community and our country," he said. "It is my duty to advocate for the issues that are important to my constituents, and I will not apologize for using every available avenue to effectively resolve them" (Pfeiffer, 2017).

The executive branch agencies conducting the review of Cuba policy ordered by the president in February, did not see the wisdom of abandoning the policy of engagement. At the end of April, the Cuban American legislators received word that their recommended actions to tighten sanctions had been watered down into recommendations to study and review their proposals. At the beginning of May, the National Security Council convened a "deputies meeting" (a meeting of the deputy heads of all the agencies involved in the Cuba policy review) to consider recommendations. Included were the Departments of Commerce, Defense, State, Treasury, Agriculture, Homeland Security, and others. All the cabinet departments had concluded that the policy of engagement was working well in their area of responsibility and should be continued. Tightening sanctions would hurt ordinary Cubans more than it would hurt the government, and should be avoided (Kroll, 2016).

For the White House, that was the wrong answer. Marc Short from the Legislative Affairs office and Carlos Díaz-Rosillo, from Jared Kushner's staff, refused to sign off on the departments' conclusion. Short, who worked on Rubio's presidential campaign, echoed Rubio and Díaz-Balart's demands; Díaz-Rosillo, a conservative Cuban American academic, concurred. The struggle, one administration official said succinctly, was between "policy and politics" (Zanona, 2017). The NSC meeting ended without a decision.

When Rubio and Díaz-Balart heard that the cabinet departments were resisting a reversal of Obama's policy, they sought a meeting with the president. "We had seen before that the administration and the president would push for it," Díaz-Balart recalled, "but every time it went down, the bureaucracy would torpedo it" (Mazzei, 2017). On May 3, he and Rubio met with Trump in the Oval Office, along with Secretary of State Tillerson, Secretary of Homeland Security John F. Kelly, National Security Advisor McMaster, Jared Kushner, and Chief of Staff Reince Priebus. The Cuban Americans urged Trump to take control of the issue away from the bureaucracy (Caputo, 2017). "The career service people, in the State Department and Treasury and in other places, are not in favor of changing this policy," Rubio warned the president. "What you've committed to do on Cuba, what you want to do on Cuba, is never going to come from career staff. It's going to have to come from the top down. You're going to have to tell them what to do".

"OK," Trump replied. "How do we deal with this?" With that, the results of the five-month policy review by the president's own executive branch agencies went out the window. McMaster offered to manage the development of a new policy within the NSC, but Rubio and Díaz-Balart became its principal drafters. The two
legislators "worked with us hand-in-glove," a senior administration official said. "Senator Rubio was certainly central to helping us with this policy" (White House, 2017). Rubio was not averse to taking credit; on June 16, he tweeted a picture of himself and Díaz-Balart hard at work in Rubio's Senate office, with the caption, "Picture of the night @MarioDB and I hammered out the new Cuba policy".

They came up with a set of proposals to resurrect sanctions from the era of George W. Bush: limiting all travel to Cuba (including by Cuban Americans) to just one visit per year; limiting remittances; cutting the number of categories of legal travel almost in half; thereby eliminating most educational and scientific exchanges; abolishing the people-to-people travel category entirely; canceling some of the licenses the Obama administration had given to US businesses to operate in Cuba, chief among them, Starwood Hotels, and banning any dealings with Cuban enterprises linked to the armed forces (Padgett and Hudson, 2017).

But the battle was not over. Key cabinet members pushed back against the draconian proposals. Revoking existing business licenses would generate a flood of lawsuits. Severe restrictions on travel would hurt US travel providers, airlines, and cruise ship lines. Limiting remittances would hurt ordinary Cubans more than it hurt the government and would cripple the emerging private sector which depended on relatives abroad for seed capital and supplies. Debate was still underway less than a week before the president's scheduled appearance to announce the new policy (Padgett and Hudson, 2017).

**Promise Made, Promise Kept**

"America will expose the crimes of the Castro regime and stand with the Cuban people in their struggle for freedom," President Donald Trump (2017) declared to a cheering crowd of Cuban exiles in Miami on June 16, 2017. "Effective immediately, I am canceling the last administration's completely one-sided deal with Cuba." That declaration was not quite true, since there was no single deal to cancel. President Obama's opening to Cuba included a series of bilateral agreements on issues of mutual interest and five packages of regulatory changes to the US embargo that Obama made unilaterally in order to boost travel and trade.

What Trump really meant by cancelling Obama's "deal" was that he was repudiating Obama's policy of normalizing relations and returning to a policy of hostility. His speech embraced regime change wholeheartedly, as symbolized by the venue — Manuel Artime Theater, named after the leader of the exile brigade that invaded Cuba at the Bay of Pigs. Trump denounced the Cuban government as brutal, criminal, depraved, oppressive, and murderous. He declared his sup-port for Cuba's dissidents, and promised that the current regime's "long reign of suffering" would not last long. Rubio, Díaz-Balart, Governor Scott, and Vice-President Pence all stood smiling on stage behind President Trump as he signed a new National Security Presidential Memorandum (2017) on Cuba, detailing new sanctions and formally revoking Obama's October 2016 Presidential Directive mandating the policy of normalization. Yet despite Trump's incendiary rhetoric, the new sanctions were fairly limited. In end, the bureaucracy blocked much of what Rubio and Díaz-Balart wanted. The new policy partially closed two holes in the embargo. Obama granted general licenses for all 12 categories of legal travel and relaxed other restrictions on who could visit Cuba. Trump 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 go to Cuba with licensed travel providers and bring back unlimited quantities of rum and cigars.

Obama opened the Cuban market to US businesses by licensing contracts with state enterprises in the travel, telecommunications, pharmaceuticals, construction, agriculture, and consumer goods sectors. Trump left those exemptions in place, but prohibited transactions with Cuban enterprises managed by the military. Even then, he exempted all existing contracts, and future contracts involving ports, airports, and telecommunications, thereby letting US cruise lines, airlines, and tech companies off the hook. Of approximately 45 non-agricultural deals signed between US and Cuban companies before Trump took office, almost all were in areas that were exempt (US-Cuba Trade and Economic Council 2017). The new regulations implementing these sanctions were promulgated by the department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control in November 2017.

Apart from these changes, Trump's policy left key elements of Obama's policy intact. Trump did not roll back Obama's other regulatory reforms expanding travel and business opportunities. 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 after reaching the United States. He did not abrogate the two dozen bilateral agreements on issues of mutual interest negotiated by the Obama administration. Asked why the president wasn't imposing even tougher sanctions, a senior administration official replied, "You can't put the genie back in the bottle 100%" (White House, 2017).

As policy, the sanctions against Cuba suffered from serious flaws that betrayed their essential nature as political theater. The new travel restrictions were likely to reduce the number of US visitors to the island, but not enough to do serious damage to the economy. The total of non-Cuban American visitors in 2016 was...
On August 9, 2017, Associated Press reported that beginning in November 2016, US embassy personnel in Havana began experiencing a range of symptoms, including hearing impairment, nausea, dizziness and mild cognitive impairment (Lee and Weisstein, 2017). The people affected first and most severely were intelligence officers, but later victims held a variety of posts (Lederman and Lee, 2017). Several Canadian diplomats were also afflicted. The United States informed the Cuban government of these incidents on February 17, 2017. Four days later, Cuban President Raúl Castro met with then US Charge d’Affaires Jeffrey DeLaurentis and pledged full cooperation, even inviting the FBI to come investigate (Lederman, Weisenstein and Gillies, 2017). Over the ensuing months, FBI investigators made four trips to Havana and were received with professionalism by their Cuban counterparts. Cuban police increased security around the diplomatic residences were most of the incidents reportedly occurred, and set up a hot line for US personnel to call to report new incidents in real time.

From February 2017 to August, the US, Canadian, and Cuban governments quietly investigated the incidents, which stopped in May but then recurred on two occasions in August. Suspicious that the Cuban government must know more than it was admitting, Washington shared only minimal information with Cuban investigators. Canada was more cooperative. Regardless, none of the three investigations was able to find any evidence of what had happened or who, if anyone, was responsible. US officials initially blamed the injuries on “acoustic attacks” (Downs, 2017), but no known acoustic technology was capable of causing the constellation of symptoms reported by the victims.

State Department officials doubted that the Cuban government was behind the incidents because of Raúl Castro’s support for improving relations with the United States and the economic benefits of expanding trade and tourism (Zilber, 2017). Nevertheless, opponents of President Barack Obama’s 2014-2016 approachment with Cuba successfully seized upon the mysterious injuries as an excuse to punish Cuba. When the diplomats’ health problems were first reported publicly in August 2017, Senator Marco Rubio (R-Fla.), a vociferous opponent of normalizing relations, demanded that President Trump close the US Embassy and expel all Cuban diplomats from the United States (Zengerle, 2017).

When Secretary Tillerson announced he was, in fact, considering closing the embassy, Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez requested a meeting to discuss the state of the investigation, during which he argued, “it would be regrettable that a matter of this nature is politicized and that hasty decisions not supported by conclusive evidence and investigation results are taken” (MINREX, 2017a). Regardless,
Reducing travel and trade—Cuban officials began to see the whole episode as an excuse manufactured by the Trump administration to reverse the progress made by President Obama’s policy of normalization. The Foreign Ministry (MINREX, 2017b) condemned the expulsion of its diplomats as “unfounded and unacceptable,” and rejected “categorically” any Cuban responsibility for the incidents. Noting the absence of evidence as to perpetrator or means, Cuba for the first time questioned whether any attacks had even occurred. In November 2017 Foreign Minister Rodríguez charged, “The US Government has decided to politicize these events and use them as a pretext to take bilateral relations back to the era of confrontation” (Rodríguez, 2017).

On March 2, 2018, the Department of State announced that the embassy in Havana would become an “Unaccompanied Post” with reduced staffing similar to what it had had since October 2018, when most US diplomats and family were recalled. US embassy staff who had been working in Washington were reassigned, further degrading US-Cuban diplomatic ties. The absence of diplomatic boots-on-the-ground meant fewer cultural and educational exchanges, slower progress on issues of mutual interest, less help for US visitors who needed consular services, and new hardships for Cubans seeking to emigrate to the United States, who had to travel abroad to get a visa.

Can this Engagement Be Saved?

As the first year of the Trump administration came to an end, US-Cuban relations teetered on the brink of collapse. The US diplomatic presence in Cuba was weaker than at any time since President Jimmy Carter opened the Interests Section in 1977. Working-level diplomats across the US government struggled to maintain practical conversations with their Cuban counterparts on issues of mutual interest at the same time as senior officials seemed intent on poisoning the bilateral atmosphere with accusations against Cuba that their own investigators could not verify. With no functioning consular section at the US embassy, Washington was certain to end the year in violation of the 1994 migration agreement with Cuba, one of the cornerstone accords that had successfully prevented a new migration crisis for 23 years.

Constituencies in support of Obama’s opening to Cuba had begun the year successfully battling back against the efforts of conservative Cuban American in Congress to dismantle bilateral relations, with the result that Trump’s policy announcement in June was rhetorically hostile, but the actual sanctions attached to it were relatively limited. However, the alleged “acoustical attacks” on US personnel gave opponents of normalization an opportunity to reopen the debate.
Once again, the administration outsourced its policy to Senator Rubio, according to his successive demands for tougher measures almost as soon as he made them. Defenders of normalization, faced with uncertainty about Cuba’s possible responsibility for the “attacks” were on the defensive politically, unable to mount the sort of counter-pressure that they had used to good effect in earlier in 2017 to limit the scope of the June sanctions.

The new US policy of hostility played into the hands of hard-liners in Havana who share a curious common interest with hard-liners in Miami in opposing warmer US-Cuban relations (Weissstein and Rodriguez, 2017). As US sanctions increased and the administration’s rhetoric became more hostile, Cuban officials gradually began to doubt whether there was any intention on the US side of maintaining a constructive working relationship. Their own rhetoric became increasingly harsh in response, though they continued to declare their willingness to engage with Washington on the basis of mutual respect.

This escalating war of words severely damaged the atmosphere of mutual respect and good faith that made the gains of Obama’s policy possible. The resulting loss of trust was likely to stall progress on issues of mutual interest. It would be harder, as Cuban officials warned in advance, to enlist Havana’s cooperation on issues ranging from narcotics trafficking to cybercrime. The short-lived engagement between the United States and Cuba announced on December 17, 2014, was broken off and unlikely to be resumed until sometime after 2020.

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LA POLÍTICA DE LA ADMINISTRACIÓN TRUMP HACIA CUBA: RUPTURAS Y CONTINUIDADES

Soraya M. Castro Marín

INTRODUCCIÓN
El retroceso en las relaciones Cuba-Estados Unidos a partir del “Memorando Presidencial sobre Seguridad Nacional” (NSPM), anunciado por Trump en Miami el 16 de junio de 2017 (Trump, 2017), y la entrada en vigor de las consecuentes medidas (Treasury, 2017) (Commerce Department, 2017) materializan la promesa de Donald Trump de revertir el proceso hacia la normalización de relaciones con Cuba, iniciado con la Administración de Barack Obama. La decisión del 28 de septiembre de reducir al personal diplomático de su embajada en La Habana, bajo el pretexto de supuestos “incidentes sónicos” (Pardo, 2017), y la espiral de acontecimientos entre los que se encuentra la expulsión de 17 diplomáticos cubanos de la Embajada (Gardiner, Hirschfeld y Londono, 2017) nos sitúan en un contexto que trasciende el retroceso, para definirlo como un enarencimiento en las relaciones Cuba-Estados Unidos de América. Lo sucedido hasta hoy sólo puede resultar en el preludio de un entorno mucho más pernicioso. En otras palabras, el escenario no sólo es negativo, sino que probablemente se mueva hacia un nivel más nocivo.

EL ENTORNO DE LA ADMINISTRACIÓN DE DONALD TRUMP
Estados Unidos se encuentra inmerso en una crisis de su sistema político que constituye el reflejo de su crisis social (Coll, 2017). Si bien, a corto plazo, la situación económica en 2018 emite señales de una mayor fortaleza, las variables macroeconómicas reflejan la persistencia de importantes señales recesivas, mientras que no se logra reducir la inequidad social, el declive de la clase media y la insatisfacción

1 Texto actualizado de la ponencia presentada en la XVI edición de la serie de Conversaciones "Cuba en la Política Exterior de los Estados Unidos de América", realizada en diciembre de 2017.