

The U.S. Defense, Intelligence and National Security Community: Cuba Poses No Threat

General Charles Wilhelm (Ret.), *Former Commander of United States Southern Command from 1997 to 2000:* “I have spent all of my adult life doing one thing and that’s tending to the security needs of this country. I’m convinced that a pragmatic relationship with Cuba will further the national security interests of the U.S... [The] Cuban military is an anemic force that is far more focused on farming than it is on fighting. Cuba’s armed forces are not capable of projecting themselves in a meaningful way and presenting conventional threats... During my three years as Commander and Chief of the U.S. Southern Command, I found no conclusive evidence that led me to the conclusion that Cuba was producing chemical or biological weapons... Furthermore, there is no compelling evidence that Cuba is a state sponsor of terrorism.... Although we find little common ground on politics with the Cubans, I strongly support the repeal or modification of our current policy toward Cuba in the interest of our nation. Certainly, such a change would profoundly benefit the United States in the security arena.”

General James T. Hill (Ret.), *Commander of United States Southern Command, 2002-2004:* “An improved and enlightened Cuba policy begins with dialogue at every level of our government, including the military... Confrontation and sanctions don’t work. Talking, working out differences, and coming to some common ground benefits both sides.” “A friendly Cuba could be a very productive participant in combating twenty-first century security threats including international terrorism, narco-terrorism, natural disasters and mass migration.”

General John J. “Jack” Sheehan (Ret.), *Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic for NATO and Commander-in-Chief for the U.S. Atlantic Command, 1994-1997:* “Cuba ceased being a security threat to the United States over a decade ago. The rest of the world has changed during that decade. Yet, U.S. policymakers remain wedded to a series of dated policies that cry out for a fresh approach.”

General Bantz John Craddock (Ret.): *Commander of United States Southern Command, 2004 - 2006, Commander of U.S. European Command (USEUCOM) and NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) as well as the commanding officer of Allied Command Operations (ACO), 2006 - 2009:* Requesting a review of U.S. Cuba policy from “stem to stern” while still on active duty, Gen. Craddock stated: “One of the things that we as a government probably don't do well is to review our policies and our laws routinely, based upon the conditions in the world changing... My judgment is we need to re-look laws, policies more often to ensure that they still make sense, given the changing conditions in the world.”

General Barry R. McCaffrey (Ret.): *U.S. drug czar, 1996 - 2001, Commander of United States Southern Command from 1994 to 1996:* “The bottom line is that this embargo policy has failed to precipitate regime change in Cuba, will not do so in the future, and harms long-term U.S. interests by limiting the ability to develop mutually beneficial relationships that will transcend the inevitable political transition that will occur in Cuba.”

Brent Scowcroft, *national security advisor to presidents Gerald Ford and George H.W. Bush:* “... Cuba is not a foreign policy question. Cuba is a domestic issue. In foreign policy, the embargo makes no sense. It doesn't do anything. It's quite clear we can not starve Cuba to death. We learned that when the Soviet stopped subsidizing Cuba and they didn't collapse. It's a domestic issue.”

Richard Clarke, *chief counter-terrorism advisor to Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, and appointed to the National Security Council President George H.W. Bush's Counter-Terrorism Security Group:* “You look at Cuba and the reason in the 1990's, in the late 1990's, why we didn't take Cuba off the list was not because they were sponsoring terrorism... It was because U.S. domestic political reasons. Factually, objectively, they are no longer sponsoring terrorism.”

George P. Schultz, *former Secretary of State for Ronald Reagan:* “I think our policy of sanctions against Cuba is ridiculous. During the cold war it made sense because it was a Russian base. They used it for flying spying missions, and so on, but that's over. And all we do by our sanctions is allow Castro, and now maybe his brother, to blame the problems of Cuba on us. And at the same time I think particularly now that there's some transitioning of some kind probably coming about, we're much more likely to get a constructive outcome if there's a lot of interaction. And to try to prevent interaction under these circumstances, I don't think is sensible.”

April 13, 2009

President Barack Obama

Dear Mr. President:

As former senior officers of the United States armed forces, we are writing today to encourage you to support the Congressional initiatives to end the ban on travel to Cuba for all Americans.

The current policy of isolating Cuba has failed, patently, to achieve our ends. Cuba ceased to be a military threat decades ago. At the same time, Cuba has intensified its global diplomatic and economic relations with nations as diverse as China, Russia, Venezuela, Brazil, and members of the European Union. It is hard to characterize such global engagement as isolation.

Though economically weak, the Castro government has kept the broad support of its people by responding to economic shocks and providing universal access to health care and education. There will be no counter-revolution any time soon.

Instead, the current embargo serves more to prop up the Castro regime and shows no sign of triggering a popular uprising against the communist government it runs. When hard times fall on the Cuban people, inevitably, the Cuban government blames the U.S. “bloqueo” for the suffering. And the people, with a strong sense of national sovereignty, rally to their flag.

Even worse, the embargo has inspired a significant diplomatic movement against U.S. policy. As military professionals, we understand that America’s interests are best served when the United States is able to attract the support of other nations to our cause. When world leaders overwhelmingly cast their vote in the United Nations against the embargo and visit Havana to denounce American policy, it is time to change the policy, especially after 50 years of failure in attaining our goals.

The congressional initiative to lift the travel ban for all Americans is an important first step toward lifting the embargo, a policy more likely to bring change to Cuba. It begins to move the United States in an unambiguous direction toward the kind of policy—based on principled engagement and proportional and discriminate action that was the hallmark of your presidential campaign. Combined with renewed engagement with Havana on key security issues such as narcotics trafficking, immigration, airspace and Caribbean security, we believe the U.S. will be on a path to rid ourselves of the dysfunctional policy your administration has inherited.

It is a clear cut case. During the Cold War, the U.S. encouraged Americans to travel to the Soviet bloc resulting in more information, more contact, and more freedom for captive peoples, and ultimately the end of the Berlin Wall and the Cold War itself. This idea of engagement underlies our current policies toward Iran, Syria and North Korea all much graver concerns to the United States – where Americans are currently free to travel. By sending our best ambassadors—the American people—to engage their Cuban neighbors, we have a much better chance of influencing the eventual course of Cuban affairs. Broader economic engagement with the island through additional commercial and people-to-people contacts will in time promote a more pluralist and open society. And, by actually striking down an element of the embargo, that signal will be sent to the government in Havana.

Mr. President, around the world, leaders are calling for a real policy shift that delivers on the hope you inspired in your campaign. Cuba offers the lowest-hanging fruit for such a shift and would be a move that would register deeply in the minds of our partners and competitors around the world.

Sincerely,

/s Brigadier General John Adams (Ret.)

/s General James T. Hill (Ret.)

/s Lieutenant General John G. Castellaw (Ret.)

/s Rear Admiral John D. Hutson (Ret.)

/s Lieutenant General Daniel W. Christman (Ret.)

/s Lieutenant General Claudia J. Kennedy (Ret.)

/s Major General Paul D. Eaton (Ret.)

/s General Barry R. McCaffrey (Ret.)

/s Lieutenant General Robert G. Gard (Ret.)

/s Col. Lawrence B. Wilkerson (Ret.)

/s Rear Admiral Donald J. Guter (Ret.)

/s General Johnnie E. Wilson (Ret.)