

July 1, 2015

Dear President Obama:

Congratulations on the announcement to reopen embassies with Cuba. Once again, the world applauds your bold actions to recast a relationship with a country where a five decades policy of US isolation failed both to dislodge an authoritarian government and to improve the lives of the Cuban people. Though most US politicians had written off reengagement with Cuba as politically impossible, last year we at the Atlantic Council published [a poll](#) proving that Americans were ready for normalization. You understood this and have not shied away from the challenges—and opportunities—that lie ahead.

As leaders of a prominent US policy center dedicated to improving relations with a rising Latin America, we have been long concerned with how US Cuba policy negatively affected relations with the hemisphere. Indeed, the most important strategic byproduct of your new policy is to begin removing the United States from the broader Cuba discussion. For too long the United States has been a convenient crutch for the failures of the island's regime.

To fully seize the moment to reignite relations with an increasingly middle-class region that is today the US' fastest growing trade partner, we urge you to do even more. You have built such excellent momentum in recent weeks; Mr. President, please do not rest on the laurels of your policy. It is critical to move beyond summits, terrorism lists, and even announcements of reestablishing diplomatic relations. In your final year and a half, you can continue to make Cuba a central pillar of your foreign policy legacy.

As the number of Cuba-related executive action items on your to-do list shrinks, we urge you to take hold of the momentum for the upcoming battle: mobilizing Congress to dismantle the anachronistic embargo. Everyone says Congressional action to lift the US embargo on Cuba is unlikely to happen anytime soon. Prove them wrong, just as you proved the skeptics wrong in December. Double down on your Cuba policy and, working with Republicans and Democrats, begin with the following actions:

**1) Mobilize to place a US ambassador in Havana.**

Push the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to hold a confirmation hearing to consider the nomination of a US Ambassador to Cuba. If the nominee receives a positive vote, push the leadership to hold a full Senate vote. If there is not action by the New Year, make a recess appointment. Some will criticize you, but this battle will highlight how those like Senators Marco Rubio and Ted Cruz are out of touch with American opinion, and—as recently reported in the *Miami Herald*—[increasingly distant with the Cuban-American population](#).

**2) Mobilize to remove the travel ban by year's end.**

The United States prohibits most Americans from traveling to Cuba—a unique intrusion into the lives of US citizens. No such restriction exists to prevent Americans from traveling to North Korea or Iran. Free up the Office of Foreign Assets Control to enforce sanctions where most needed and important, against countries such as Russia in support of Ukraine or Iran to reduce the export of terrorism. Your expansion of travel licenses operates within the previous framework of Helms-Burton, but is nowhere near full expression of Americans’ right to travel. Work with Senators such as Jeff Flake and Patrick Leahy and the forty-four cosponsors of a bill to end the travel ban to build bipartisan support for its complete removal.

**3) Mobilize to end the remittance cap.**

The easing of remittance restrictions could have a significant impact on the Cuban economy and on supporting the entrepreneurial spirit of Cubans. In December, you boldly increased the amount of permissible remittances to non-family members in Cuba from \$500 to \$2,000 per quarter. But, more can be done. Push Congress to remove all remittance restrictions under Helms-Burton, and, if Congress will not act, use your authority to lift the cap.

**4) Push for greater US agricultural exports to Cuba.**

Now that financial restrictions no longer constrain farmers and businesses as they once did, your administration should fight for further agricultural exports to Cuba, which imports 80 percent of its food. Although US exporters must no longer be paid before a product leaves US shores, they continue to be at a disadvantage. Law prevents them from offering any financing, like loans. Allowing for the purchase of US foodstuffs on credit—like most of the world—will help feed a cash-starved island and give US farmers greater access to a nearby market currently dominated by other countries.

**5) Find ways to support Cuba’s integration into international financial institutions (IFIs).**

Cuba’s integration into international financial institutions will benefit both the Cuban population and the international community. Access to technical expertise and to monies from institutions such as the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the IMF would support Cuba’s reintegration into the world economy while encouraging transparency and the nascent Cuban private sector. Give maximum leeway to the IFIs to begin confidence-building discussions and to offer technical assistance to Cuba. Push Congress to amend Helms-Burton and related legislation to allow US executive directors to vote for Cuban membership once it fulfills the requisite obligations. If this becomes impossible, establish a limited-term “truce” (through the coming presidential election) whereby Congress agrees that it will not withdraw funds from IFIs if assistance is given to Cuba.

**6) Visit Cuba before the end of your administration.**

A US president has not visited Cuba while in office since Calvin Coolidge in 1928. The symbolism of such a visit—even without the dismantling of sanctions—would rival President Richard Nixon’s visit to China. Then—and today—China, like Cuba, remains an authoritarian regime with a terrible human rights record. Nonetheless, you correctly have deemed it in the national interest to work with and visit China. A presidential visit would allow you to speak directly to the Cuban people about the democratic values we cherish.

Region-wide polling has shown that nearly all 585 million Latin Americans enthusiastically support what you have done so far. A bipartisan majority of Americans do so as well. Use your political capital to lock in an unprecedented level of goodwill toward the United States unseen in the hemisphere for decades.

Sincerely,



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