

A LONG ROAD TO HAVANA

Overcoming a Half Century of Hostility in American-Cuban Relations

By William M. LeoGrande

On December 17, 2014, President Barack Obama and President Raúl Castro shocked the world by announcing in simultaneous television broadcasts that they had reached agreement to begin normalizing relations between the United States and Cuba. With that, they stepped away from half a century of hostility to open what Obama called “a new chapter” in their relationship. This dramatic, historic turn of events came as a surprise because relations had remained essentially frozen for the preceding six years, despite Obama’s declared desire to improve them and Raúl Castro’s repeated offers to engage with Washington diplomatically on the basis of mutual respect.

Much has been accomplished since that 2014 announcement. The United States removed Cuba from the list of state sponsors of international terrorism, diplomatic relations have been fully restored, the two presidents have twice met face-to-face for substantive discussions, and teams of diplomats are working through other issues. Nevertheless, the legacy of five decades of hostility will not be easily erased. Many issues remain unresolved and the path forward is marked by uncertainty. The U.S. economic embargo, the central issue, can only be removed by the U.S. Congress, where Obama’s Republican opponents have been in no mood to cooperate. Obama himself has only a year left in office, and almost all the declared Republican presidential candidates have promised to roll back his opening to Cuba. In Havana, Raúl Castro is scheduled to step down at the end of his second term as president in 2018, and no one can predict whether his successor would have the political will or authority to press ahead on normalizing relations with Washington.

▷ Cuban woman poses wearing an American flag dress, Havana, August 4, 2015. *Enrique de la Osa/Reuters/Corbis*

Cold War Conflict

President Obama came to office convinced that the old policy of isolation and hostility toward Cuba made no sense. In the 1960s, Cuba became a focal



point in the Cold War, leading to such memorable crises as the Bay of Pigs invasion and the Cuban Missile Crisis. But for more than half a century, neither a comprehensive economic embargo nor covert political action could bend Havana to Washington's will.

In April 2009, at the Fifth Summit of the Americas just a few months after his inauguration, Obama promised the other heads of state he would seek "a new beginning" with Cuba. Yet for the next six years, relatively little changed. Obama did take important steps to restore and expand the people-to-people connections that his predecessor, President George W. Bush, had severed. In April 2009, he lifted all restrictions on Cuban American family travel and remittances. In January 2011, he expanded the scope of permissible academic exchanges and restored the category of people-to-people educational travel that Bush had abolished. But in state-to-state relations, there was little progress.

Publicly, U.S. officials blamed Havana for the stalemate, citing the December 2009 arrest and imprisonment of U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) subcontractor Alan Gross. As part of USAID's "democracy promotion" programs targeting Cuba, Gross had traveled to the island to install in several communities a sophisticated digital infrastructure that could connect to the Internet by satellite. The Cuban government regarded this as subversive and sentenced Gross to fifteen years in prison. The Obama administration declared that no further progress could be made in U.S.-Cuban relations until Havana freed Gross.

Privately, the administration also felt politically constrained. In Congress, a single-minded group of Cuban American members was willing to obstruct administration legislative proposals and nominations if the White House even hinted at improving ties with Havana. In 2009, Senator Robert Menendez, a Democrat representing New Jersey, blocked an omnibus appropriation bill needed to keep the government open until the administration promised not to change Cuba policy without consulting him. Senate confirmation of Obama's nominee for Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Arturo Valenzuela was held up for six months.

With the U.S. economy slow to recover from the Great Recession of 2007–08, Obama faced a tough reelection battle, as foreshadowed by the Democrats' loss of control of the House of Representatives in 2010. White House political advisors warned against any action that might infuriate Cuban American voters in the swing state of Florida—even though Obama had carried Florida in 2008 despite his promise to improve relations with Havana.

In Latin America, hopes ran high when Obama took office that he would finally tackle the anachronistic policy toward Cuba that symbolized a bygone era of U.S. hegemony. At the Fifth Summit of the Americas in Trinidad and Tobago in April 2009, the Latin American presidents pressed Obama on Cuba, making it a litmus

test of his declared desire to forge a new “equal partnership” with the region. On the whole, they were satisfied by Obama’s promise to seek a new beginning with Cuba, though he was short on specifics.

But by the time the Sixth Summit of the Americas convened in Cartagena, Colombia, in April 2012, U.S. policy toward Cuba was essentially unchanged. Obama faced a solid phalanx of Latin American presidents no longer willing to passively accept Washington’s intransigence. Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua and Rafael Correa of Ecuador refused to attend the summit because Cuba was not invited; Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos, host of the meeting, and Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff both declared that they would skip the next summit if Cuba was excluded again. The growing political and economic independence of Latin America from the United States, and the elections of “new left” governments in the region, had eroded the region’s traditional deference to U.S. policy.

Obama returned from Cartagena chastened by the vehemence and frustration expressed by the other heads of state. The president was “severely” and “universally criticized” for U.S. policy toward Cuba, a senior U.S. official later acknowledged to journalists, citing this as one of the reasons behind Obama’s decision to normalize relations. “Our previous Cuba policy was clearly an irritant and a drag on our policy in the region,” Roberta S. Jacobson, assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs, said after the announcement. Another senior official described the policy to journalists as “a huge burden, if not an albatross, on our relations in the hemisphere. The last Summit of the Americas, instead of talking about the things that we were focused on [in Cartagena]—exports, counternarcotics, citizen security—we spent a lot of time talking about U.S.-Cuba policy.”

As the Seventh Summit of the Americas approached, the Latin American states were unanimous in their support for inviting Cuba despite U.S. objections. Cuba, for its part, voiced its interest in participating, just as it had in 2012. Unless Washington relented and abandoned its opposition to Cuban participation, Obama faced the prospect of another embarrassing confrontation.

December 17 Surprise

Even the best policy proposals go nowhere unless they are politically viable. Although rising diplomatic pressure from Latin America put the issue of Cuba on the president’s agenda, a decision to reverse a policy that had been in place since the 1960s entailed political risks at home. In 2010, Obama’s political team blocked a relatively modest State Department proposal to restore people-to-people travel, reinstating a policy originally put in place by President Bill Clinton. Finally, in frustration, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton took the issue directly to the president and won his approval.

But even then, the announcement was delayed until after the 2010 congressional elections, lest it hurt Democratic candidates in Florida.

In 2012, the president carried Florida on his way to reelection, and to everyone's surprise, won half the Cuban American vote in the state—more than any Democrat since Cuban Americans became a significant voting bloc in the 1980s. Florida politics was changing. Polling by Florida International University (FIU) since 1991 had chronicled the gradual evolution of Cuban American opinion. When FIU began polling, 87 percent favored continuation of the U.S. embargo. By 2014, 52 percent opposed it, and 71 percent no longer believed it was effective. In 1993, 75 percent of respondents opposed the sale of food to Cuba and 50 percent opposed the sale of medicine. By 2014, solid majorities—77 percent and 82 percent respectively—supported both. In 1991, 55 percent opposed unrestricted travel to Cuba, whereas in 2014, 69 percent supported it.

These attitudinal changes among Cuba Americans were a product of demographic change. Exiles who arrived in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s came as political refugees opposed to Castro. Those who arrived during the Mariel exodus in 1980 and after were more likely to have left for economic reasons. Recent arrivals, especially those who came after the end of the Cold War, were far more likely to have maintained ties with family on the island, and were therefore more likely to favor policies that reduce barriers to family connections, especially the ability to travel and send remittances.

For years, Democrats believed that a tough policy toward Cuba was the right strategy to win enough Cuban American votes to carry Florida. In 2008, Obama took a new approach by appealing to moderates with a policy of engagement. That proved to be a winning strategy. By carrying Florida in 2008 with 35 percent of the Cuban American vote, Obama proved that a Democrat could take a moderate stance on Cuba and still make inroads with this solidly Republican constituency.

In April 2009, the president made good on his campaign promise by lifting all limitations on Cuban American family travel and remittances. Over the next four years, Cuban American visits to the island rose from about one hundred thousand per year to four hundred thousand, and remittances jumped from a billion dollars annually to more than \$3 billion. By loosening these restrictions, Obama accelerated the reunification of Cuban families and helped reinforce the political strength of moderate Cuban Americans in south Florida—the foundation of his political strategy there. It paid off in 2012, despite Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney's appeals to the community's traditional anti-communism. Having defied conventional wisdom that only a "get tough on Cuba" platform would sell in south Florida, Obama changed the domestic political dynamics of the issue, making new thinking about Cuba politically feasible.

After winning reelection, President Obama decided the time was right to seek a breakthrough in relations with Cuba. The plan to open a secret dialogue took shape

over a series of White House meetings in early 2013 to discuss the president's second-term agenda. In April, U.S. officials contacted Havana about initiating negotiations. Talks began in June and lasted eighteen months, with most of the sessions held in Canada and one critical culminating session held at the Vatican.

Yet even while the secret talks were underway, senior U.S. officials worried about the politics of the issue, especially the idea of releasing the "Cuban Five"—five Cuban intelligence officers in jail in the United States—to win the release of Alan Gross. For the White House, Gross' freedom was a necessary condition for any wider agreement; for Havana, freedom for the Cuban Five was a necessary condition for releasing Gross. Yet Washington refused to accept that Gross and the Cuban agents were "equivalent," (insisting that the Cuban Five were spies while Gross was just an innocent aid worker) and therefore refused to consider a swap. For months, the secret talks remained deadlocked on this issue.

In Congress, a growing number of members thought it was time to change Cuba policy. Unaware that secret talks were underway, a core group of senators and congressmen set out to encourage the White House to take bold action to free Gross and break the stalemate in bilateral relations. As Tim Rieser, a senior advisor to Democratic Senator Patrick Leahy of Vermont, put it, "We knew that the president opposed the policy, the secretary of state opposed it, the vice president opposed it—everybody in the administration opposed it. Therefore, why couldn't we change it?" The group met repeatedly with senior White House officials, cabinet members, and eventually the president himself. In the Oval Office meeting, the members pressed Obama to fulfill his pledge to replace the policy of hostility with one of engagement. "You said you were going to do this," Democratic Representative Jim McGovern of Massachusetts reminded the president. "Let's just do it!"

At the same time, a major lobbying push was taking shape among nongovernmental organizations. Led and coordinated by the Trimpa Group, a public affairs policy and advocacy firm, a multimillion dollar campaign was launched in early 2014. In discussions with senior U.S. officials, the Trimpa team realized that U.S. officials still feared the political fallout from a deal with Cuba. The lobbying campaign was tailored to alleviate that fear by mobilizing moderate Cuban Americans in organizations like the Cuba Study Group and CubaNow, sponsoring polls to demonstrate public support for a new policy, recruiting luminaries of the foreign policy establishment to call for change, and working closely with the members of Congress who were urging the president to act.

Even the Roman Catholic Church got involved. When the Vatican announced that Obama would meet with Pope Francis in March 2014, the proponents of a policy change recruited three different cardinals (Theodore McCarrick of Washington, DC, Seán Patrick O'Malley of Boston, and Jaime Ortega of Havana) to encourage the pope

to raise the issue of Cuba with Obama. In fact, much of their hour-long conversation focused on Cuba; Obama told the pope about the secret dialogue, and Francis offered to help in any way he could. A few months later, he sent letters to both Obama and President Raúl Castro that, according to the Vatican, “invited them to resolve humanitarian questions of common interest, including the situation of certain prisoners, in order to initiate a new phase in relations.” Then in October, the Vatican hosted the penultimate negotiating session in which an agreement was finalized.

On December 17, the two presidents announced the historic breakthrough. The United States released the three members of the Cuban Five still in prison and in exchange Cuba released Rolando Sarraff Trujillo, a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) asset imprisoned for almost twenty years. Cuba released Gross on humanitarian grounds as well as fifty-three Cuban political prisoners. Cuba also agreed to engage with the International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations on human rights and prison conditions. Obama agreed to welcome Cuban participation in the Seventh Summit of the Americas and to review Cuba’s designation as a state sponsor of terrorism. He also exercised his executive authority to ease restrictions on financial transactions, remittances, sales to private businesses, and travel to Cuba. Most importantly, the two presidents agreed to restore full diplomatic relations—a decision symbolic of the move away from a relationship of hostility and recrimination, and toward one of engagement and mutual respect.

No Illusions

Within weeks, diplomats from the U.S. Department of State and the Cuban Foreign Ministry began meeting to implement their presidents’ mandate. In April, Obama and Castro met face-to-face for their first substantive discussion, at the Seventh Summit of the Americas in Panama. They reaffirmed their commitment to normalize relations and discussed the issues that would need to be resolved. “This is obviously a historic meeting,” Obama acknowledged. “We are now in a position to move on a path to the future. There are still going to be deep and significant differences. ... But we can disagree with the spirit of respect and civility, and over time it is possible for us to turn the page and develop a new relationship.”

“No one should entertain illusions,” Castro cautioned in his brief comment. “Our countries have a long and complicated history, but we are willing to make progress in the way the president has described.” In closing, he added, “We are willing to discuss everything, but we need to be patient, very patient.”

Shortly thereafter, the State Department announced that Cuba would be removed from its list of state sponsors of international terrorism—a designation that Cuba found especially insulting in light of the long history of paramilitary attacks launched

against the island by Cuban exiles who at one time had the support of the U.S. government. On July 1, Obama and Castro announced the agreement to restore full diplomatic relations on July 20.

In September 2015, Raúl Castro made his first trip to the United States as Cuba's president, to attend the United Nations General Assembly meeting. On the sidelines, he and Obama met for half an hour for what the Cubans described as a "respectful and constructive" dialogue. Obama urged Castro to undertake reforms that would allow Cubans to take advantage of the regulatory changes he had made to the embargo, and Castro reiterated his demand that Washington lift economic sanctions against Cuba. Yet despite their disagreements, both presidents interacted cordially and emphasized their commitment to continue the process of normalization.

The reestablishment of diplomatic relations marked the successful conclusion of "the first stage" of the dialogue between the United States and Cuba, observed Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez, but a "complex and certainly long process" of negotiations lay ahead before the two countries would have truly normal relations. "The challenge is huge," he added, "because there have never been normal relations between the United States of America and Cuba."

For the next stage of dialogue, the two governments formed working groups to begin dealing with the complex patchwork of issues that former President Fidel Castro once referred to as "a tangled ball of yarn." To coordinate the normalization process, they established a Bilateral Commission—a steering committee to meet quarterly to assess progress and set the agenda for a series of more specialized working groups tackling specific issues.

There are effectively two baskets of issues: those on which the two countries have interests in common, where cooperation could be expanded; and those on which they have interests in conflict that need to be resolved or mitigated.

After the flag-raising ceremony at the Cuban embassy in Washington on July 20, Foreign Minister Rodríguez met with Secretary of State John Kerry to discuss these "issues of mutual concern," including migration, human trafficking, law enforcement, counternarcotics cooperation, maritime safety and coast guard cooperation, environmental protection, global health cooperation, the expansion of civil aviation links, and the restoration of postal service. In fact, through the years of animosity, Cuba and the United States maintained low-level cooperation on a number of such issues. The normalization of diplomatic relations opened the door to deepening that cooperation. For example, the U.S. Coast Guard and Cuban Border Guards have been working together to stem narcotics trafficking through the Caribbean since 1999, but only on a case-by-case basis. That collaboration could become more systematic through joint planning, joint exercises, and intelligence sharing.

Before the Deep Water Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010, the only U.S.-Cuban dialogue on environmental protection was between Cuban scientific institutes and U.S. nongovernmental organizations like the Environmental Defense Fund. But when Cuba began drilling in its deep water commercial zone not far from the Florida coast in 2012, Washington opened a quiet dialogue under the umbrella of the Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Information and Training Center for the Wider Caribbean, a multilateral organization supported by the United Nations. In January 2015, President Obama issued a general license allowing U.S. companies to provide equipment and services to Cuba for environmental protection. In the event of an accident in Cuban waters, U.S. companies could respond immediately, without waiting for government permission. In November 2015, the two governments signed cooperative agreements on protecting the maritime environment in the Caribbean, and shortly thereafter, announced agreements on restoring normal airline connections and postal service.

Global public health and disaster assistance were other potentially fruitful areas of cooperation. Cuba and the United States worked together to provide medical relief after the January 2010 earthquake in Haiti, and again in West Africa to stem the 2014 Ebola epidemic. In September 2015, U.S. and Cuban medical teams in Haiti met to expand their cooperation. But Washington's Cuban Medical Professionals Parole Program hindered more systematic cooperation. A vestige of the George W. Bush administration, this program offers Cuban health workers serving abroad on humanitarian missions a fast track to U.S. residency and citizenship if they defect.

The interests in conflict between Washington and Havana constitute a more formidable agenda. A working group on claims is reviewing the \$7 billion that the United States claims Cuba owes for the property nationalized at the outset of the revolution (\$1.9 billion plus a half century of interest), and Cuba's counterclaims for over \$100 billion in damage done by the embargo and the CIA's secret paramilitary war in the 1960s.

A working group on law enforcement is discussing human smuggling, document fraud, and fugitives. Some seventy U.S. fugitives reside in Cuba, most of them common criminals. However, some—like Black Liberation Army activist Assata Shakur (aka Joanne Chesimard)—are high-profile expatriates to whom Cuba has granted political asylum. The United States harbors a number of Cuban exiles accused of violence, the most notorious being Luis Posada Carriles, accused of blowing up a Cuban civilian airliner in 1976 killing all seventy-three people aboard, and orchestrating bombings in Havana tourist hotels in 1997. The United States refuses to extradite Carriles, or any exile accused of politically motivated violence, and Cuba refuses to return people to whom it has granted asylum. Nevertheless, there is precedent for Cuba repatriating common criminals to the United States, and the United States returning hijackers to Cuba.

A third group working on human rights—among the most contentious issues—is discussing the very different perspectives the two governments have on the balance between social and economic rights, and political liberties. Discussion focuses on compliance with the international human rights covenants that both governments have signed, but to date has not found much common ground.

Then there are programs, like the Cuban Medical Professionals Parole Program, that are vestiges of the old U.S. policy of regime change and remain in place. The normalization of relations might have happened sooner had it not been for Washington's covert democracy promotion programs which led to the arrest of contractor Gross in December 2009. The breakthrough in the secret negotiations to normalize relations only happened when Cuba agreed to release Gross as part of the broader prisoner exchange. But the programs that landed Gross in prison are still operating, and Cuba continues to regard them as subversive. Their continuation poses an ever-present risk of confrontation that could disrupt the normalization process. Obama cannot simply halt these programs unilaterally because they are authorized and funded by Congress, although senior administration officials privately acknowledge that the programs are incompatible with the new direction of U.S.-Cuban relations.

Radio and TV Martí, created during the Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush administrations, continue broadcasting to Cuba, even though they have little or no audience because of the Cuban government's success at jamming them. TV Martí is referred to on the island as *la TV que no se ve*—No See TV. Based in Miami, the two stations are captives of the exile community's hardliners and don't even reflect Cuban American opinion any longer, let alone U.S. policy. Moreover, they have a track record of trying to undermine attempts by U.S. presidents to improve U.S.-Cuban relations. When Bill Clinton negotiated migration agreements with Cuba and expanded people-to-people educational exchanges, Radio Martí was a persistent critic of even this limited policy of engagement, repeatedly misrepresenting U.S. policy so severely that it sparked complaints from several U.S. government agencies and officials. In September 2015, as U.S. and Cuban diplomats were trying to build trust in order to advance the normalization process, TV Martí announced plans to launch a satirical sitcom that would ridicule Cuban leaders.

Then there are issues the United States still refuses to discuss. The 1966 Cuban Adjustment Act gives any Cuban reaching the United States, legally or illegally, the right to become a permanent resident after one year. Cuba has called for its repeal because it creates an incentive for human smuggling, but Washington insists it has no intention of changing the law. The reason is fear; after December 17, the number of Cubans intercepted by the Coast Guard trying to come to the United States illegally jumped sharply. Worried that the normalization of relations would mean an end to the

Adjustment Act, would-be immigrants decided they had better act fast. The Obama administration fears that any effort to change the law could touch off a migration crisis.

Speaking to a conference of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States shortly after December 17, Raúl Castro declared that fully normal relations with the United States would require the return of Guantánamo Naval Station. The Obama administration, however, insists that Guantánamo “still has operational value”—since 2002, it has been the site of a detention camp in the U.S. War on Terrorism—and its return is not open for discussion. Washington recognizes Cuban sovereignty over the territory, but insists on the validity of the 1934 treaty leasing it to the United States in perpetuity. Every year, the U.S. government sends Cuba a rent check for \$4,085. Cuba never cashes them; for years, Fidel Castro kept them stuffed in his desk drawer in his office to show visitors.

Finally, and most importantly, U.S. economic sanctions against Cuba remained in place after December 17, despite Obama’s licensing of a limited number of exceptions. Although Obama had called for an end to the sanctions, both the embargo as a whole and the specific ban on tourist travel were written into law in 1996 and 2000, respectively, so they could only be lifted by an act of Congress. For Cuba, this issue is by far the single most important since the persistence of sanctions inflicts ongoing damage to the Cuban economy. In October 2015, for the twenty-fourth year in a row, the United Nations General Assembly voted overwhelmingly, 191-2, with no abstentions, for a Cuban resolution demanding that the embargo be lifted. Despite some preliminary conversations, Cuba was unwilling to soften the resolution sufficiently to entice the Obama administration to abstain rather than vote no. Convinced that international pressure was an important contributing factor to Obama’s decision to normalize relations, Havana was unwilling to do anything that might signal a relaxation of that pressure.

2016 and Beyond

Congress is the biggest obstacle to fully normalizing relations. With Republican presidential aspirants blasting Obama for appeasing America’s “enemies,” Republican congressional leaders will not allow any legislation to pass that makes Obama’s Cuba policy look like a success. Thus there was little chance the 114th Congress would heed Obama’s call to repeal the embargo. Obama will probably not even be able to appoint an ambassador to Havana; a single senator can block a nomination, and Republicans Marco Rubio and Ted Cruz, and Democrat Robert Menendez have all vowed to block any nominee. Thus, the big legislative battles on Cuba will probably not come until after Obama leaves office in 2017.

Republican presidential candidates have harped on Cuba as part of their narrative about Obama’s weakness in foreign policy. Rubio, the most incessant and vitriolic

critic of the policy, managed to position himself among the leading contenders. All the candidates kept their eyes on the Republican primary in Florida, where Cuban American conservatives constitute a substantial voting bloc.

But once the primary season gives way to the general election campaign, Cuba is likely to disappear from the debate. Poll after poll has shown that Obama's Cuba policy is widely popular, even among Republicans. An Associated Press poll in July found 71 percent in support of restoring diplomatic relations with Cuba, and 58 percent in support of Obama's Cuba policy overall. Even a majority of Cuban Americans support it. Outside the hothouse of the Republican base, it looks like a foreign policy success. Moreover, not many voters will cast their presidential ballot in 2016 based on the candidate's position on Cuba. For most Americans, it just isn't that salient.

Nevertheless, a Republican president could reverse everything Obama has done to improve relations with Cuba because all his actions have relied on executive authority. However, the diplomatic cost would be enormous in Latin America and beyond. Obama's opening to Cuba was undertaken in part because of the deterioration in U.S. relations with Latin America caused by the old policy, and his December 17 announcement received universal and enthusiastic endorsement throughout the hemisphere. Rather than try to undo all that Obama has done, a Republican president would be more likely to simply halt the normalization process in its tracks, leaving relations to languish in a twilight zone between hostility and normality.

A Democratic president, on the other hand, would have an opportunity to make real strides forward, especially if the Democrats win back the Senate. The gerrymandered districts of the House of Representatives make it almost impossible for the Democrats to reclaim a majority there, even if they win more votes in House elections nationwide than Republicans, as they did in 2012. But in the Senate, twenty-four Republicans and only ten Democrats are up for reelection in 2016. With a Senate majority, the White House could make a serious push to repeal the embargo, allowing normal trade, investment, and tourist travel.

Whatever the outcome of the 2016 U.S. elections, there are deeper forces pressing for change on both sides of Florida Strait that successor politicians in Washington and Havana cannot ignore. Cuba's successful integration into the global economy will still require an end to the embargo and the expansion of trade and investment from the United States. Cuba's tourist industry will still need access to the U.S. market to fuel its expansion. U.S. businesses will continue to push for the right to compete in the Cuban market. Latin America will demand that Cuba be fully reintegrated into the hemispheric community. As Cubans and Cuban Americans travel back and forth in increasing numbers, along with other U.S. travelers, they will continue to knit back together the social and cultural ties severed after 1959.

The overwhelming support for reconciliation recorded by polls in both Cuba and the United States demonstrated that ordinary people were ready for reconciliation long before their governments. Expectations are running high, now that the process is underway. Politicians will ignore that sentiment at their peril. As Secretary Kerry said at the ceremony raising the American flag to mark the reopening of the U.S. embassy in Havana, “The time is now to reach out to one another, as two peoples who are no longer enemies or rivals, but neighbors—time to unfurl our flags, raise them up, and let the world know that we wish each other well.”