



Written by [Daniel Sayani](#) on January 21, 2011

Obama Opens Trade and Travel Relations With Communist Cuba

On Friday, January 14 President Obama announced that he plans on easing trade and travel relations with Communist Cuba, including making it easier for U.S. citizens to travel directly to the island from American airports. The President added that he had instructed the relevant government departments to allow religious groups and students to travel to the communist-run island.



The new rules also allow American citizens easier access to sending money to Cuba, which Obama believes will support “civil society” there.

For almost half a century, the debate has been raging over the United States’ policy towards Cuba, which has been communist since Fidel Castro’s coupe de etat in 1959. Free travel from the U.S. to Cuba was halted in 1963 under President John F. Kennedy. The explanation at the time for why Americans could visit the Soviet Union but not Cuba was that the communist government in Moscow was permanent but that Fidel Castro was temporary. In 1977, with Cuba still unchanged, President Jimmy Carter relaxed the travel ban. In 1982, President Ronald Reagan restored it.

In 1998, with the Soviet Union “gone,” Clinton loosened it and in 2004, with Cuba still unchanged, President George W. Bush tightened it again. Now President Obama is going back to the Clinton policy, which will make it easier for churches and universities to sponsor trips to the communist state.

Obama’s announcement calls for changes in policy at the Departments of State, Treasury, and Homeland Security, as both travel and remittances are involved in the changes, and the new regulations will be promulgated as modifications of the Cuban Assets Control Regulations and the Customs and Border Protection Regulations.

The new policies call for the following reforms to Cuba-United States relations. According to the [BBC](#), Obama’s new proposals:

- Allow religious organizations to sponsor religious travel to Cuba under a general license;
 - Allow accredited institutions of higher education to sponsor travel to Cuba;
 - Allow any U.S. person to send remittances (up to \$500 per quarter) to non-family members in Cuba to support private economic activity;
 - Allow remittances to be sent to religious institutions in Cuba in support of religious activities
- Allow U.S. airports to apply to provide services to licensed charters.

According to a White House [press release](#):

The President believes these actions, combined with the continuation of the embargo, are



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important steps in reaching the widely shared goal of a Cuba that respects the basic rights of all its citizens. These steps build upon the President's April 2009 actions to help reunite divided Cuban families; to facilitate greater telecommunications with the Cuban people; and to increase humanitarian flows to Cuba.

Obama has a long history of pro-Castro rhetoric and policy proposals, much to the dismay of anti-communists, including most members of the strongly anti-Castro, anti-communist Cuban exile community, which overwhelmingly voted for Obama's opponent, Senator John McCain (R-Ariz.) in 2008. Tea Party favorite Senator Marco Rubio, himself a member of the Cuban exile community and a Florida Republican, [declared](#) in response to Obama's proposals:

I strongly oppose any new changes that weaken U.S. policy towards Cuba. I was opposed to the changes that have already been made by this administration and I oppose these new changes. I believe that what does need to change are the Cuban regime's repressive policies towards the independent press and labor unions, its imprisonment of political prisoners and constant harassment of citizens with dissenting views, and its refusal to allow free multi-party elections.

It is unthinkable that the administration would enable the enrichment of a Cuban regime that routinely violates the basic human rights and dignity of its people.

Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.), who represents much of Miami's Cuban-American community in Congress, and is the current Chairwoman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, also strongly condemned Obama's pro-Castro proposals in a [press release](#):

“Loosening these regulations will not help foster a pro-democracy environment in Cuba. These changes will not aid in ushering in respect for human rights. And they certainly will not help the Cuban people free themselves from the tyranny that engulfs them.”

“These changes undermine U.S. foreign policy and security objectives **and will bring economic benefits to the Cuban regime.**” [Emphasis hers.]

When campaigning in 2007-2008, Obama separated himself from other candidates by indicating an openness to conducting direct, bilateral relations with those regimes which are hostile to American safety and interests, including Cuba, Iran, Syria, Venezuela, and North Korea. During the campaign, Obama also raised the ire of many Cuban-Americans, as one of his campaign offices in Houston, Texas [prominently displayed a Cuban flag](#) with an image of Marxist Revolutionary Che Guevara affixed to it.

Cuban-born author Humberto Fontava, who escaped communist Cuba in 1961 and authored the book *Exposing the Real Che Guevara: And the Useful Idiots Who Idolize Him*, lamented the fact that Guevara, who was responsible for the deaths of countless Cubans during the 1959 revolution and even advocated a nuclear holocaust against the United States in 1962, was held in such high esteem by the Obama campaign.

The White House states also that families will not be allowed to direct funds to “senior members of the Cuban Communist Party” or to “senior Cuban government officials.” This vaguely exclusionary language allows for the possibility that funds can legally be transferred to lower-ranking leaders and members of the Cuban Communist Party, as well as to government officials of lesser stature.

Of even greater concern is the proposed statute to allow direct visits from the United States to Cuba for “purposeful academic and religious purposes.” This policy decision merely serves to embolden a significant portion of Obama's political base: radical leftist academicians and clergy, who strongly



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support the Castro regime, as well as their “right” to visit the Marxist state at whim, where they are often graciously hosted by the ruling communist elite. This proposed statute demonstrates that such policy proposals amount to government-sanctioned support of the Cuban propaganda machine.

Such groups include Pastors for Peace, a “religious” group that sponsors trips to Cuba as an “Ecumenical group to advance the struggles of oppressed people for justice and self-determination.” Organized by the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization, the group sponsors caravan trips to Cuba aimed at protesting what they perceive as the United States’ “cruel and unjust blockade” of the communist island, a position also taken by several members of the Congressional Black Caucus — a partner of Pastors for Peace — which has organized trips to Cuba with the organization.

Obama’s changes also facilitate “purposeful travel” for the sake of “educational exchanges,” which the [White House](#) states will allow American college students and professors the unfettered opportunity to attend academic and political conferences organized in Communist Cuba, for the purpose of “enhancing contact with the Cuban people and supporting civil society through purposeful travel, including religious, cultural, and educational travel.”

Unfortunately, such proposals serve not to ameliorate the plight of the oppressed people of Cuba, but merely allow Americans the opportunity to financially and intellectually support the repressive Caribbean regime, now with the overt consent and approval of their government.

Rather than sending the message that the United States and the American people reject communist oppression and support the human rights of the Cuban people by standing firm against their dictatorial government, Obama is instead sending the message that the United States is willing to betray victims of communism purely for the sake of “dialogue” with the Cuban government.

Furthermore, relaxing such commercial and travel restrictions with Cuba sends the United States down a slippery slope of not only legitimizing the revolutionary Marxist government of Fidel Castro, but also legitimizing the reversal of the United States’ embargo against Cuba, which has been in place since 1963.

Obama’s previous announcement in April 2009 that he fully intended to remove as many “barriers” to open travel and trade with Cuba as possible resulted in congratulatory affirmations from Fidel Castro. Castro had even met with three members of the Congressional Black Caucus — Rep. Bobby Rush (D-Ill.), Rep. Emanuel Cleaver (D-Mo.), and Rep. Barbara Lee (D-Calif.) — in 2009, asking them “How can we help President Obama?,” according to [Martin Sieff](#) of UPI, who believes that the reversal of travel and trade restrictions is indicative of an imminent lifting of the embargo.

(Around the time of Obama’s announcement in 2009, indicative of the changing political attitude in the United States toward Cuba, a bipartisan coalition of U.S. Senators, including Indiana Republican Richard Lugar, who also voted and led the GOP push for the pro-Russia START Treaty, called for an end to the American embargo.)

Castro himself has offered [support and encouragement](#) to Obama on several occasions. According to *WikiLeaks* cables, Castro has demonstrated great affection for Obama. One cable in particular, “Fidel Castro Impressed by POTUS [President of the United States] after Cairo Speech,” refers to Castro’s taking delight in Obama’s defeatist speech addressed to the Muslim world in Cairo, Egypt, on June 4, 2009. According to the [cable](#):

Fidel mostly sympathized with POTUS — in his own way — regarding the first section, which included the fact that the U.S. is not at war with Islam, the Israel-Palestine issue, and Iran and



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nuclear weapons. Specifically, Fidel said, “One cannot blame the new president of the United States for the situation created in the Middle East.

Obama’s policy, therefore, is a mere “next step” along his trajectory of policies which feed directly into the hands of communism and anti-American interests abroad, whether in relation to Cuba, Russia, or the Middle East.

Commenting on Obama’s decision, Castro’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement, saying that it represents “a step in the right direction.” The communist regime looks favorably upon Obama’s decision, and believes that it stems from the same conciliatory attitude embodied by those who oppose the embargo. The Ministry says, as published in the Cuban state news *Granma Internacional*:

The adoption of these measures is the result of efforts by broad sectors of U.S. society which, in their majority, have been demanding the end of the criminal blockade of Cuba and the elimination of the absurd prohibition of travel to our country.

It is also an expression of recognition that the U.S. policy towards Cuba has failed.

While the White House wants us to believe that these policies constitute “reaching out to the Cuban people,” they constitute nothing less than the United States selling itself and its people, as well as the people of Cuba, out to an enemy communist government inimical to our national interests.

Photo: The Gran Teatro (left) and Hotel Inglaterra, on the Prado, facing Parque Central in Havana



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