



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on March 16, 2016

White House Eases Travel, Commerce Restrictions Imposed on Cuba

A statement issued by White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest on March 15 stated that “significant regulatory changes” being announced that day by the Departments of the Treasury and Commerce would “make it easier for Americans to travel to Cuba, expand access to U.S. financial institutions and the U.S. dollar from Cuba, and expand the ability for Cubans living in the U.S. to earn a salary.”



The changes will be implemented just days before President Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama will travel to Cuba on March 21 and 22.

The press statement linked to another from February 16 on the U.S. Department of Transportation website announcing that Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx, Assistant Secretary of State for Economic and Business Affairs Charles Rivkin, and several Cuban counterparts had just signed an arrangement that provides for the reestablishment of scheduled air services between the United States and Cuba.

Ben Rhodes, a deputy national security advisor and foreign policy speechwriter for the president, stated that the policy changes have been undertaken so the United States is better able to support engagement with the Cuban people and “build bridges between our two countries.”

“Consistent with existing law, we are doing what we can to support a greater engagement,” AFP quoted Rhodes as saying. He continued: “At the same time, we believe that the best way to support a better life for the Cuban people would be through lifting the embargo and the travel ban that have not succeeded in bringing change to the lives of the Cuban people.”

Rhodes’ summary of the changes appeared in a report in the *Miami Herald* and included:

- **Individual travel** — Americans on people-to-people educational tours to Cuba previously were required to travel in organized groups. They may now plan their own itineraries provided that they keep records for five years showing that they have engaged in a full-time schedule of educational exchanges.

Individual travelers may also make trips under the auspices of an organization that sponsors people-to-people exchanges. In such cases, the responsibility of record keeping is the sponsor’s.

However, stated Andrea Gacki, acting deputy director of Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control, “Travel for tourist activity remains prohibited by statute.”

In other words, noted several writers, a visitor’s travel must have an educational purpose and not consist solely in lounging at the beach.

- **Banking regulations** — The Treasury Department has released details of new banking regulations that could ease bankers’ reluctance to do business with Cuba. Under the new rules, U.S. financial institutions will be able to process cash, travelers checks, and other U.S. dollar-denominated monetary



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instruments indirectly presented by Cuban financial institutions.

- **Employment** — U.S. companies may hire Cuban nationals, in a non-immigrant status, to work or perform in the United States provided that no additional payments related to their sponsorship or hiring are made to the Cuban government. For example, Cuban athletes, artists, and performers who obtain the necessary visas will be allowed to come to the United States and be paid salaries and expense stipends.

Gacki said: “This is going to give important benefits to Cuban nationals looking to live and work in the United States without forcing them to make the decision to defect.”

- **Cargo** — Vessels and aircraft leaving the United States with cargo for Cuba and for other destinations will now be able to travel to Cuba and continue on their routes to make further deliveries without applying for a specific license.

- **Exports** — U.S. companies, which were allowed to open offices and establish a physical presence in Cuba previously, can now export or reexport items to Cuba to establish and maintain those offices. The United States also will adopt a policy of case-by-case review of U.S. exports and reexports to Cuban entrepreneurs that would help the private sector export its own products.

The Treasury Department has posed a list of “Frequently Asked Questions” related to Cuba on its website: [\[click here.\]](#)

These changes in U.S. economic and travel policies are part of the Obama administration’s “new course on Cuba,” the details of which are described in an article posted on the White House website. The article notes that “decades of U.S. isolation of Cuba have failed to accomplish our objective of empowering Cubans to build an open and democratic country” and correctly states that “today, as in 1961, Cuba is governed by the Castros and the Communist party.”

According to [whitehouse.gov](#), the administration’s “new course” will, among other things:

- Reestablish diplomatic relations;
- More effectively empower the Cuban people by adjusting regulations;
- Facilitate an expansion of travel to Cuba.

While these objectives appear to be promising, they ignore the reality of life in a communist-controlled country, where all commerce is controlled by the government and large-scale private enterprise is practically nonexistent.

While many people assert that normalizing relations with Cuba will benefit the people there, in an [article last September](#), we quoted a statement by journalist José Diaz-Balart, the news anchor of MSNBC’s *The Rundown*, observing that conditions in Cuba had only worsened since the United States restored diplomatic relations with the communist country last July 20. In response to a statement that Raúl Castro (shown on left) made to the UN General Assembly on September 28, in which he called for the United States to end its embargo on Cuba, Diaz-Balart, speaking on MSNBC’s *MTP Daily* on September 29, said,

You know, the embargo, if you look at how it was codified into law, it’s pretty basic and simple on how the embargo would be lifted.... It’s pretty simple how that would go away. If there is a call for free and fair elections, if political prisoners are released, if unions are allowed to organize and people can move freely within the country. If those three things happen in Cuba, then the embargo



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would cease to exist.... You call for democratic elections, you have a release of political prisoners, and have unions and the embargo's over.

When *MTP Daily* host Chuck Todd asked, "Ever since the United States cut this deal and opened up diplomatic relations with Cuba, tell me what's happened to political prisoners in Cuba." Diaz-Balart replied, in part,

Well, the increase of repression has been clear.... Over the weekend, 70 people were arrested in Cuba. That includes Ladies of White [Damas de Blanco] and dissidents. The three dissidents that tried to approach the pope are still unaccounted for in prison. A lot of questions by Raul Castro, but what is going to cause a change in that government that's been in power since January 1st of 1959?

The reason for the imposition of the U.S. embargo on Cuba in 1960 and the suspension of diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba in 1961 was that the U.S. government finally recognized that the Cuban regime headed by Fidel Castro was both communist and brutally repressive.

The John Birch Society, with which *The New American* is affiliated, and this magazine have long warned against the folly of U.S. aid and trade with communist governments, which only serve to strengthen the control that such regimes have over their populations.

The fact that even some very constitutionalist members of Congress have called for an end to sanctions against Cuba may lead some constitutional conservatives to ask if such sanctions are constitutionally sound. The answer is, simply because something is constitutional does not mean it is prudential. While it is never a good idea to intervene militarily in another nation's affairs simply because that nation's government is totalitarian, neither is it prudent to enable that regime's stronghold on its population by channeling economic benefits to it. That simply allows the ruling regime to disburse or to withhold those benefits from its people as a means of controlling them.

If and when the day comes that the communist regime ruling Cuba releases its grip on the nation's people and economy so that the revenues derived from trade and travel can flow directly to the people instead of to the government, that will be the time to remove sanctions.

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