



Russia and Cuba Get Cozy

Recently, Russia has expressed interest in reviving both economic and military ties with its erstwhile Caribbean client state, ties that languished after the implosion of the Soviet Union in the early '90s. Cuba, for its part, is interested in cultivating partnerships with other regimes besides Hugo Chavez' Venezuela. While Cuba has long resented what it regards as Moscow's abrupt betrayal and abandonment of the Castro regime at the end of the Cold War, every indication points to a willingness on both sides to bury the hatchet. After the 9/11 attacks in 2001, Russia supposedly abandoned the huge Soviet-built Cuban electronic eavesdropping center at Lourdes, which was run by 1,500 Russian military and KGB/FSB technicians, but that has not been verified. But Cuba continues to monitor and jam American government and civilian signals and broadcasts — either from Lourdes or the Communist Chinese-built facility 20 miles from Havana.



“Russia seeks to reassert itself as a world power, which includes a renewed presence in Latin America, while Cuba wants to diversify its economic partners to reduce its dependence on Venezuela,” explained Dan Erikson at Inter-American Dialogue in Washington, D.C., as reported in a recent Reuters story.

Russia has also signaled a willingness to re-establish a military presence in Cuba, including a possible missile defense system. Referring to Russian anger at the U.S. deal to set up a missile defense system in Poland and the Czech Republic, Cuba expert Phil Peters at the Lexington Institute in Virginia told Jeff Franks of Reuters, “Russia is clearly irritated at what it perceives as U.S. meddling in its neighborhood. It seems to be sending a message that if you play on our periphery, we’ll play in yours.”

Some U.S. analysts were doubtful Cuba would rebuild its military alliance with Russia. “It’s impossible to imagine that anyone in the Cuban leadership would want to put their country in the bull’s eye of another superpower showdown reminiscent of the missile crisis,” Brian Latell, a former CIA analyst, told Jeff Franks.

The Putin/Medvedev government, however, is offering a very different take. Following the Sechin and Patrushev visit to Havana, the Russian Security Council said in a statement that the two countries had agreed to work “to restore traditional relations in all areas of cooperation.”



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