

OBAMA AND CUBA: NEW AMERICAN – CUBAN RELATIONS

OBAMA I KUBA: NOVI AMERIČKO-KUBANSKI ODNOSI

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Abstract: *The announcement of US President Barack Obama on restoration of diplomatic relations with Cuba was political bombshell given that USA and Cuba had no diplomatic relations since 1961. President Obama explained that its time to “break with bonds of the past” while president Castro thinks that American embargo must to be solved first. As previously announced it is planned to reopen embassies due to future migrations between two countries.*

Soon after Obama’s announcement, Cuban President Raúl Castro proclaimed that although the United States may have changed its position on the embargo, Cuba intends to continue along its socialist economic and political path.

Key words: *Cuba, the USA, relations, embargo, foreign policy*

Sažetak: *Najava američkog predsjednika Baraka Obame o obnovi diplomatskih odnosa s Kubom predstavljalo je “političku bombu” s obzirom da SAD i Kuba nemaju diplomatske odnose od 1961. godine. Predsjednik Obama je objasnio da je vrijeme da se “raskine sa okovima prošlosti”, dok predsjednik Kastro smatra da se najprije mora riješiti pitanje američkog embarga. Planira se ponovno otvaranje ambasada zbog budućih migracija između dviju zemalja.*

Ubrzo nakon Obamine najave, kubanski predsjednik Raul Kastro je izjavio da će, bez obzira na eventualno američko ukidanje embarga, Kuba nastaviti svoj socijalno-ekonomski i politički put.

Ključne reči: *Kuba, SAD, relacije, embargo, međunarodna politika*

1. INTRODUCTION

After the overthrow of the pro-American president Fulgencio Batista, a regime of leftist Cuban movement under Fidel Castro tried to implement various economic and political reforms that made Cuba the first socialist i.e. communist country in the western hemisphere. Numerous guerilla movements tried to copy Cuban revolution strategy while the USA reaction to this event lead up to the biggest Cold War escalation. Long diplomatic isolation of Cuba in Latin America ceased when the Cold War ended. Only when the right military regimes were replaced by the democracies in the most of the neighboring states, Cuba was able to establish diplomatic and economic relations with these countries.

United States imposed an economic embargo in 1962 that caused immeasurable damage to both sides. Especially for Cuba because it represented an insuperable problem in terms of trading with the rest of the world. The United States, as the world’s largest economic power,

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could impose penalties to the states or companies that cooperated with Cuba. The US position was that the blockade will continue as long as "Cuban government refuses democratization and greater respect for human rights". "Sporadic congressional efforts to end the embargo have failed due to the political influence of powerful Cuban exiles who insisted on isolating Cuba and trying to strangle its economy to force Castro out". [1] After the dissolution of the bipolar system of international relations, during which Cuba strongly inclined to USSR and was dependant on it there was no need for any revolutionary changes between Cuba and the United States. The USA was probably reluctant to deal with quite controversial situation having in mind that there is a very large Cuban- American community within the USA.

Basically foreign policy goals of president Obama's administration were "restoring the position of the moral leader" in a world that was lost during the previous administration. That was to be achieved through improving the relations with allies and third countries, as well as the full withdrawal of US troops from Iraq and Afghanistan that were stuck there for 12 years.

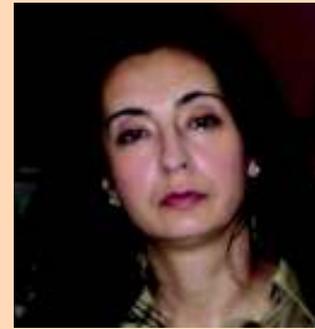
2. NEW RELATIONS ANNOUNCEMENT

President Obama's statement on restoration of American-Cuban relations was certainly a surprise for all those who knew that Cuba hasn't been in the focus of US policy for a long time.

Statements on US-Cuban relations improvement came after the release of an American citizen who was imprisoned in Cuba and three Cubans who were detained in the United States (American Alan Gross, who was arrested in 2009 and sentenced to 15 years in prison for conspiracy) [2].

Obama's administration estimated that the release of Gross removed barriers to relations improvement with Cuba and opened the way for wider discussion and strengthening ties, and perhaps even to end the decades-long economic blockade of the island. The deal included the release of three Cubans who were imprisoned in the USA.

President Obama explained that its time to "break with bonds of the past" while President Castro thought that American embargo had to be solved first. As previously announced it was planned to reopen embassies due to future migrations between two countries. According to some statistics only in 1965, 300,000 people emigrated from Cuba to the USA. [3] It is also estimated that 1.2 million people left Cuba after Castro gained power till 2000. [4]



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Godine 2013., odbranila je magistarsku tezu "Bušova velika strategija" na Fakultetu političkih nauka u Podgorici. Aktivno govori engleski i španski jezik, pasivno italijanski.

Steps towards normalization of relations between the two countries began in 2013 when President Obama approved secret negotiations with Havana. As it turns out secret dialogues were hosted by Canada and Vatican. After months of talks seems that half a century hostility between the two countries could finally be brought to an end. American foreign policy which has expired, then it is the policy towards Cuba", because "when you are doing something that doesn't work for 50 years, it's time to try something new. [5]

In 2008 when Fidel Castro announced that he was officially stepping down President Bush viewed it as "period of democratic transition in Cuba" [6]. Raul Castro announced important steps when it comes to the limited duration of the mandate for all officials, including his mandate, which will end in 2018, and brought younger leaders in the State Council.

President Obama's decision to renew ties with Cuba was welcomed by European and South American leaders. Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro said it was the biggest step of Obama's presidency," while the presidents of Brazil and Argentina declared that their generations of fighters for social justice "were convinced that they would never see the restoration of diplomatic relations between Cuba and the USA". [7]

Vladimir Putin thought it was "step in the right direction". Most Republicans denounced Obama's change of policy towards Cuba. Senators John McCain and Lindsey Graham find that the change in policy towards Cuba is leading to the collapse of American values". According to them it is about the appeasement of autocratic dictators, thugs, and adversaries, diminishing America's influence in the world. [8] Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, John Boehner is also strongly against Obama's turn towards Cuba and considers it just another bad move in a series of "meaningless concessions of cruel dictatorship". Bonner believes that relations with Cuba should not be changed at all, let alone normalize until the Cuban people are free". Boehner thinks that 18 months of secret negotiations produced a bad deal – bad for the Cuban people" as the administration "compromised bedrock principles for minimal concessions. [9]

For a complete abolition of the embargo Obama will need support of the Congress, but because of the resistance of conservative Republicans and some prominent politicians of Cuban origin it will be somewhat more difficult and slower.

Two key senators Marco Rubio, most likely candidate for the Republican president, and Robert Menendez - senator from New Jersey, chairman of the [United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations](#) who, although democrat, are strongly against measures proposed by president Obama. President Obama initiated opening of diplomatic relations but everything else, including embargo is under jurisdiction of Congress. [10]

Fidel Castro commented on this sudden relations thawing, saying he does not believe the US policy, nor is in contact with them, but Cuba will always strive for cooperation and friendship with all nations of the world, including their political opponents. [11] Cuba urges the United States to remove it from the list of countries that sponsor terrorism. The US has put Cuba on the list in 1982 claiming that Havana supports the FARC rebels in Colombia, as well as Basque separatists in Spain. But the USA confirmed that "there was no indication that the Cuban government provided weapons or paramilitary training to terrorist groups". [12] On the other hand, Raul Castro claims that communism on Cuba will not fade away. He assures that every state has its right to choose political system and nobody can argue that the improvement of relations with the United States means that Cuba is renouncing its ideas. [13]

The efforts of the United States to restore diplomatic ties with Cuba and ease economic sanctions against that country represents "an exceptional opportunity" for US companies, as was stated by Thomas Donohue, president of the US Chamber of Commerce, pointing out that US companies can sell all kinds of products to Cuba, from cars to the computers. He proclaimed that it was time for a new approach since some other countries already increased trade with Cuba, including Russia and China." [14]

But many are skeptical. It's hard to believe that the United States so easily give up after all attempts to overthrow the Cuban socialist government. It's more likely that this move of president Obama could mean that the USA wants to prevent deeper influence to Cuba primarily China and Russia.

In geopolitical terms, the White House is upset by the increasing penetration of Russia and China in Latin America and the Caribbean, and that Cuba remains a strategic ally of Russia. Visit of Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov to Cuba, Nicaragua and Guatemala in March is an obvious reason for US concern.

In economic terms, the entry of Cuba into the world economic system opens new markets and new opportunities to US corporations that will have a professional and cheap Cuban labor force, and at the same time they might invest in tourism, tobacco, coffee, seafood and benefit from the success of Cuban scientists in field of microbiology and medicine.

There are promising indications that so far unbridgeable gap between capitalism and communism in the Caribbean area could finally be overcome.

CONCLUSION

The USA wants to maintain the powerful position of being the regional hegemon of the Western Hemisphere. Thawing relations with Cuba, president Obama has withdrawn an excellent move for enabling the USA diplomacy additional space to act in Central and South America, and he also sent a message that the official US policy has a "human face".

When making this decision his administration must have been motivated by the increased presence of Russia and China in the "backyard" of the USA, as Latin America is commonly referred to. China is Cuba's largest creditor and has rescheduled Cuba's commercial debt which is believed to be six billion dollars. Russia has strengthened ties with Cuba and other South American countries through arm deals and bilateral economic agreements what is certainly perceived as a threat to Washington's historical influence in the region. When president Putin visited Havana in 2014 the two countries signed about a dozen contracts in areas such as industry, energy, health and disaster prevention and infrastructure. Russia also wrote off 32 billion dollars of Cuban debt from Soviet era. No doubt that these developments at US borders had to get an answer from Washington.

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charged to work for the US intelligence service and that he acts "against the independence and territorial integrity of Cuba" and was sentenced to 15 years in prison. His lawyers, as well as the US government, denied the allegation that he was involved in espionage activities on this island. More in [Michael E. Ruane](#), T. Rees Shapiro, and [Ian Shapira](#), *Amid jubilation by relatives and friends, a 'Hanukkah miracle' for Alan Gross*, Washington Post, December 17, 2014

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