

# US-CUBA RAPPROCHEMENT

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## SUMMARY

After more than 50 years of a hostile relationship, the United States of America and Cuba have normalized their relations by reestablishing diplomatic and economic relations. On December 17, 2014, the rapprochement was proclaimed by Presidents Raúl Castro and Barack Obama. Why was it precisely during Barack Obama's presidency that the rapprochement took place? What was it that made Obama and his team succeed in doing what previous US presidents have failed to do? What were the impediments for not changing the US policy toward Cuba for previous US presidents? This work aim was to respond to the questions posed. Apart from changes in interests from both Cuban and US side, the two countries have changed the perceptions of each other throughout the years. These two factors are starting points for the constructivist approach with which it was proved that this were the factors which enabled Obama and his team to normalize relations with Cuba.

Keywords: rapprochement, Barack Obama, Fidel Castro, US policy.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Why exactly Barack Obama was the first president in more than 50-years period to change a policy toward Cuba will be proven using a constructivist approach which advocates that rapprochement has been prompted by a change in ideas, interests and identities from both sides (Behravesch 2011). No president before Obama has been able to start negotiations or to change the policy toward Cuba because impediments were numerous. Nevertheless, attempts at rapprochement existed but did not take hold because both sides have put in the first place their global ambitions and interests (Zawatsky and Gemma 2015).

Fidel Castro has brought a turnaround to Cuba by introducing a communist regime which the US has seen as a threat. Further, in the 1960s Soviet Union has

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become the greatest economic and political ally of Cuba which was in clash with American interests. However, right after the Soviet Union collapsed and Moscow stopped sending aid to Cuba, Castro has made some economic adaptations to preserve its regime and its country's economy. Also, Cuba further opened to the world and US after Venezuelan leader Hugo Chávez died in 2013. His death together with economic and political instability of Venezuela have forced Cuba to look for a new economic partner (Jacobs 2015).

Another factor that opened the possibility for rapprochement has been a cessation of the Cuban support for leftist movement in Africa. During Jimmy Carter's presidency Fidel Castro has supported "anti-US guerilla movements" in Africa thus preventing normalization of the relations between the US and Cuba to take place (Jacobs 2015).

Another impediment to rapprochement has been Cuban-American lobby which has been very powerful throughout years (Zawatsky and Gemma 2015). They are a big ethnic group that has an important influence "over US foreign policy towards Cuba" (Cassells 2015). Up until 1980s Cuban Diaspora opposed lifting the embargo and forming closer ties with Cuba. However, Cubans which came to the US after the 1980s have turned out to be in favor of establishing good relations with Cuba which allowed for rapprochement to take place (Cassells 2015).

Obama's policy shift has been triggered primarily by the failure of the approach conducted by his predecessors. Second, the US has lost a great portion of influence in the Latin American region and Latin American states have formed a strong resistance against the embargo (Hershberg and Dolezal 2016). That together has compelled Obama to put an end to the policy of hostility thus preventing further cleavage in US-Latin American relations.

Thirdly, due to economic and political changes within Cuba, Obama could improve relations between US and Cuba. So, contradicting interests have changed through years which ultimately enabled Obama's administration to start rapprochement process with Cuba (Lambrecht 2015).

Many factors have affected the policy change. Both Obama and Raúl have recognized the right moment and have started a new era in US-Cuba relationship. It is most important to say that the change occurred because it was in the interest of the United States and Cuba. Foreign policies of both countries have changed, criticism from the region and the world was growing and both states realized that animosity no longer made sense (Renwick, Lee and McBride 2016). With constructivism it will be proven that the change in ideas and interests have led to the rapprochement.

The starting point of constructivism is that identities shape the interests of states. So, how a state will act and what it will want depends on its identity. Consequently, interests determine what kind of relationship countries will have with other nation-states. In state-relationships everything is based on mutual understanding. How states perceive themselves and one another determines their relationship (Behravesh 2011).

The US has always perceived itself as a superior state responsible for saving other weaker countries. First, they involved and saved Cuba from Spanish colonialism and then continued to control the country because it was considered too weak to manage itself (Leonard et al. 2012). Also, US believed it had the task to form Cuba as a democracy. After the attack on September 11, 2001, US foreign policy changed. President Bush brought a new "National Security Strategy of the United States" (Amstutz 2013: 60). What was at the core of this strategy was that the US as a perfect model of democratically arranged state has the duty to introduce other countries to democracy and spread the word around. Democracy was considered to be the best form of government to promote human dignity and world order (Amstutz 2013). For the US, Cuba was one of those states that needed US help and was endangered by communist rule.

On the other hand, Cubans did not see the US as a savior. For them, the US represented another colonizer which has dominated their island without giving them freedom and sovereignty. Further, Castro felt that he should free Cuba from US dominance. From the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Cuba has been under US influence and Castro did not want the US to play any role anymore in Cuba. According to constructivism national interest of a state can be defined as "life, liberty and property" and a "collective self-esteem" (Behravesch 2011). That is exactly what the US took from Cubans. Autonomy and economic well-being are parts of the national interest. Both were not sufficiently under Cuban control which was a trigger for Castro's revolution. And when Castro's revolution succeeded the Americans did not welcome it with enthusiasm. And as soon as Cuba allied with the Soviets, US started viewing Cuba as a national security threat. Cuba was already in the hands of Communists, and now they allied with the greatest American opponent. US' respond to provocation was the economic isolation of the island for more than 50 years. Up until the communist threat was gone, it was not in US interest to normalize the relations. Even though the threat disappeared with the disintegration of Soviets, isolationist policy remained in place for another 23 years (Ramírez, n.d.).

## 2. DETERIORATION OF RELATIONS

The economy has been the main factor that has worsened relations between the two countries at the beginning of the 1960s. Firstly, Castro has decreased Cuba's dependence on the trade with the US by expanding trade with the Soviet Union and thus has revealed his preference. Cuba's allying with the Soviet posed a security risk for the US since Cuba now had an ally which the US perceived as enemy close to its borders (Lambrecht 2015). Further, Castro raised taxes on imported goods from the United States and conducted nationalization of the properties in US' possession. This was followed by a series of economic sanctions from the US which have escalated into a full economic embargo proclaimed by President John F. Kennedy (Renwick, Lee and McBride 2016). The US government believed that with the embargo, Castro's revolution will be toppled very soon. Since Kennedy's administration did not sup-

port Castro's communist political ideology, secret operations aimed at overthrowing Castro have begun in 1961. Cuban's mistrust in the US emerged following one unsuccessful attempt to overthrow the Castro's government. That attempt has been conducted by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and it happened in the Bay of Pigs. However, the invasion failed and consequently gave Castro impetus to strengthen communism and his regime on Cuba (Lambrecht 2015).

After the invasion, Cubans, stimulated by distrust in American government, have deepened their partnership with the Soviet Union. What followed from the partnership was the construction of Soviet missile base on Cuban soil. It did not take long for the United States to find out about that and to start off "a fourteen-day standoff," also known as the Cuban Missile Crisis (Renwick, Lee and McBride 2016). In October 1962, one of the most frightening days for humankind have started. In these days, US-Cuban conflict almost escalated into a nuclear conflict. The US placed a naval quarantine around the island to prevent offensive weapons to be brought to Cuba. Soon after, Nikita Khrushchev sent a message to Kennedy with the intention to reach an agreement so that the world does not have to suffer a thermonuclear war (Milestones: 1961–1968). The agreement was reached only after the United States promised not to invade Cuba. The agreement also sought the destruction of nuclear facilities from Cuba and eradication of "US nuclear missiles from Turkey" (Renwick, Lee and McBride 2016).

These events have led to a longtime deterioration of relations between the two countries. However, it must be noted that throughout years Cuba and the US have remained very connected through collaboration on certain issues, such as migrations. But factors that in previous years have contributed to mutual gains, such as the economy, no longer connected Cuba and the US. So, the US has taken a firm position toward Cuba which now excluded any economic interdependence. With the embargo in power and US companies within Cuba falling under Cuban ownership, the US had no economic interest in Cuba. Further, security that was always in the first place for the Americans was undermined by Soviet's impact on Cuba (Lambrecht 2015).

### 3. IMPEDIMENTS FOR PREVIOUS PRESIDENTS

#### 3.1. CUBAN-AMERICAN LOBBY

After Fidel Castro became president, many Cubans who did not support him were expelled or voluntarily decided to move to the US, primarily Florida (Seeds of Change in Little Havana, 2010). These early exiles strongly disagreed with Castro's revolution and believed his government will be promptly toppled (Peters 2000). But, that has never occurred. Nevertheless, Cubans within the US have gained a political power and have used it wisely. The ability to manage US policy toward Cuba was given to them because they constitute the majority of voters in Florida and New Jersey and possess significant financial resources. Since relations between two

states deteriorated, US presidential candidates had to be very careful when taking a stance toward Cuba because whether Florida will vote for them dependent on it (LeoGrande 2015). Florida carries a lot of importance for presidential candidates since it brings "29 votes in the United States Electoral College, who chose the U.S. president" (Lambrecht 2015: 24). Also, throughout the years, Cuban exiles financially and politically supported presidential candidates and members of the Congress who opposed rapprochement with Cuba. The lobby's political power persisted through numerous US presidents (LeoGrande 2015). The Cuban-American community has been particularly influential through Reagan and Clinton's terms in office.

During Ronald Reagan's presidency, the cornerstone of the Cuban lobby has been Cuban American National Foundation (CANF), led by Jorge Mas Canosa (Lambrecht 2015). The organization dictated US' policy toward Cuba for decades. "Via their political action committee 'Free Cuba', the organization funded candidates with a rigid anti-Castro attitude and lobbied for anti-Cuban legislation" (Lambrecht 2015: 24). According to the article "The Role of Ethnic Interest Groups in U.S. Foreign Policy: The Case of the Cuban American National Foundation", CANF's main purpose was advocating for Regan's hostile policy toward Cuba (Haney and Vanderbush 1999). It can be said that CANF and Regan's administration lived in a "symbiotic relationship". CANF owes its political triumph to the support of Reagan's administration and the fact that it was created because of a common aim (Haney and Vanderbush 1999).

The power of Cuban lobby was also evident during Bill Clinton's presidency. At the time when he had to pick "assistant of the secretary of state for inter-American affairs", the lobby has argued against the appointment of Mario Baeza (Seeds of Change in Little Havana, 2010). He was not the appropriate candidate in the eyes of the lobby because he went to Cuba once. Soon after, Cuban lobby forced Clinton to dismiss one of his National Security Council officials because he helped Cubans in emigration to the US. Since Canosa died, CANF has been replaced by "U.S.-Cuba Democracy PAC", which is known for generous campaign donations (LeoGrande 2013). To a large extent, Cuban Americans are responsible for the US not restoring ties with Cuba for more than 50 years.

It was the financial and political power of the Cuban-American community that intimidated many US presidents to change approach toward Cuba. Since most of them were expelled from Cuba, they did not want Fidel to succeed. That is why they supported the embargo and a hostile policy of the US toward Cuba. For that reason, they were one of the biggest obstacles because of which US-Cuba rapprochement did not take place earlier (LeoGrande 2015).

### 3.2. SUPPORT FOR LEFTIST MOVEMENTS IN AFRICA

What was against American interest from the very beginning of the 1970s was Fidel Castro's support for leftist movement in Africa and region of Latin America. Castro wanted other Latin American states to rebel against the US (Peters 2000). From the nineteenth century, Latin-American states were a tool in the hands of

the powerful United States. Not to say that the US was an imperial giant, but it used these countries for its own economic expansion (Leonard et al. 2012). Castro considered himself “as a patriot determined to keep an overbearing neighbor from once again imposing its will on Cuba”, and he has hoped that other Latin American states will follow his path (Peters 2000: 4). However, Latin American states were not ready for such revolutions and Castro has decided to instead focus his support on revolutionary movements in Africa (Jacobs 2015). Although Russians have opposed it, he gave an impetus to leftist government in Angola by sending a great number of soldiers. Consequently, the US has involved and backed the apartheid regime. Partially owing to the Cuban soldiers, Angolans could overcome the South African rebels (Kornbluh, Pérez Jr. and Fletcher 2016).

Henry A. Kissinger who has been President Richard M. Nixon’s security advisor advocated for the abolition of the embargo. Improving the relations with Cuba seemed like a good idea since US Congress at that time wanted to repeal the embargo. What instigated Kissinger’s decision was renewing of the trade relations between Cuba and Latin American countries and many European nations. So, secret talks over the embargo issue have started but were cut short because of Cuban military interference in “Angolan Civil War” and “Puerto Rican independence” movement (Leonard et al. 2012). The following president, Jimmy Carter has shown great interest for normalizing relations with Cuba by opening Interest Sections both in Washington and Havana. It stopped at that since Castro was unwilling to withdraw its soldiers from Africa. Over the coming years, the story repeated. Each time a step forward was being made, Americans would demand the withdrawal of the troops, to which Castro would not agree. Further, Ronald Reagan was a tough opponent of communism who requested full termination of Cuban relations with Soviets in exchange for the US-Cuba rapprochement. This request was made in 1981 and as expected, Fidel Castro refused it (Leonard et al. 2012). Reagan stated that if the US was to start rapprochement with Cuba back then, it would have been seen as reconciliation with communist regime. He knew that Castro was decisive in spreading communism through supporting various revolutions. Clash of two opposite ideologies, capitalism from US and communism from Cuba constantly impeded renewing of relations between two countries (Haney and Vanderbush 1999).

On the other hand, the US had good relations with China and Vietnam which have remained communist countries. So, why was it that Cuba was exception? According to Kornbluh (2014), not renewing relations was an “issue of interest and politics”. It is not same to have a neighbor 90 miles away ruled by communists, then a state far away. “What Constructivism posits is that a gun in hands of a friend is a different thing from one in the hands of an enemy and the task is to understand ideas that give meanings to friends and enemies” (Ramírez, n.d.). Moreover, Castro has shown his tendency toward spreading communist ideology around the globe, which conflicted with the US’ intention to spread democratic principles (Leonard et al. 2012).

Namely, in 2002, President Bush has introduced a new *National Security Strategy of the United States*, also known as “Bush Doctrine” (Amstutz 2013). Promoting the

democratic principles was one of the core ideas presented in the doctrine. According to Mark. R. Amstutz, "democracies are inherently pacific" (Amstutz 2013: 61). Democracies are promoters of peace and are compatible with ideals and interests of the US. Bush also said that since peace and democracy are closely connected, it was duty of the US to spread democracy and introduce other nation states with such a system. This doctrine became a basis for American foreign policy conduct. Cuba was among states that should have been introduced to the principles of democratic conduct. Whereas Castro did not want to succumb to democracy, numerous American presidents refused to normalize relations with Cuba (Amstutz 2013).

Such a foreign policy being conducted by Cubans was aimed at weakening the US. Cuba's major ally in revolutionary missions abroad was the Soviet Union. In turn for a political support, Soviets supplied Cubans with military and economic aid. Soviet economic aid help to rebuild Cuban economy which has weakened under the influence of embargo. Cuba has stopped being a national security threat to the US when the Soviet Union collapsed. At that moment, military aid that was coming from Soviets has stopped, thus forcing Cubans to cease backing revolutionary movements. Since Cuba no longer had a superpower to watch her back, Cuban foreign policy shifted. Castro has realized that it would have been too risky and costly to continue backing Marxists' revolutionary movements and his troops have returned to Cuba. The new foreign policy was directed toward expanding and improving Cuban economy. It called for foreign investments which was a complete turnaround in what Castro so far has been advocating and doing. The relation was damaged in the first place due to nationalizing American companies in Cuba (Dominguez 1997).

Even though Castro has stopped supporting Marxists movements abroad in the 1990s, the policy of the US toward Cuba continued to remain the same for little over than 10 years. Why was that so? What bothered the US policy makers was the preservation of the regime on the island. Castro's regime was still in power and it represented a formidable obstacle in US-Cuba relations. Also, to the US, Cuba no longer represented a security threat. Cuban troops returned to Cuba and Cuba's foreign policy focused on economic growth (Dominguez 1997). Hence, Cuba's importance for the US considerably diminished since it no longer posed a threat (Peters 2000). In the twenty-first century, US' interests have shifted toward bigger issues such as terrorism and globalization which were of greater importance for the US (Leonard et al. 2012).

### 3.3. INTERNAL CUBAN POLITICS

What impeded US-Cuba rapprochement from the very beginning has been the Cuban political system. Not that it just impeded the rapprochement, but it was one of the reasons for breaking diplomatic ties between the two. In the article "Cuban Political System: More Than Just Castro", Cuba is described as "a state that has enjoyed a quasi-monopolistic control of every sphere of economic, political, social, and cultural life since the Revolution in 1959" (2009: 1). Cuban state as we know it today emerged from the revolution after which it was envisaged that Cubans will

independently lead and control their own country. In the eyes of the Cubans, the US was a tyrant from which Cubans had to be saved and liberated, and this served as a justification for Fidel Castro's political regime. And anyone or anything that was opposed to Castro's regime was prosecuted and maltreated. Communist Party of Cuba exists since the revolution and it dominates Cuban political system. Other political parties or associations are allowed in so far as they respect regime and the principles of socialism. It is written in Cuban Constitution that the "Communist Party of Cuba, a follower of Marti's ideas and of Marxism-Leninism, is the highest leading force of society and of the state, which organizes and guides the common effort toward the goals of the construction of socialism and the progress toward a communist society" (Orenstein 2009: 10). Further, "frequent, fair and free elections, political pluralism, and freedom of expression" do not exist in Cuba (Orenstein 2009: 4). There is no such thing as freedom of the press in Cuba because the Communist Party restrains any information against the government to be published. "A report published recently by Freedom House regards Cuba as a country without free media and ranks it in the low 190 position out of 195 possible candidates" (Orenstein 2009: 10).

Cuban governmental structure is complex in so that governmental branches are not precisely separated. There are three bodies within the Cuban government and those are: "The National Assembly of People's Power (NAPP), the Council of State, and the Council of Ministers" (Orenstein 2009: 4). President of the state, i.e. currently Raúl Castro has the highest authority within both Councils. In the end, it all comes down to the fact that Raúl Castro enjoys full autonomy over the Cuban government (Orenstein 2009). Additionally, what presented a problem throughout decades was the fact that state had a sole control over the economy. Castro's regime managed to survive, although the global failure of authoritarian regimes to achieve the promised economic growth has caused their breakdown. How did Castro's regime manage to survive for so long has been a question posed by many. However, with the arrival of Raúl, a little has changed for better, for ex. foreign investments have been allowed but nevertheless, the economy remained in state hands (Orenstein, 2009).

With all of the above mentioned, this kind of political system varies from democracy in absolutely every respect. An ordinary man is a prisoner of the system. The international community and especially the US has for that matter did everything it could to change that and gradually introduce democracy. Numerous US presidents have tried to establish friendly relations with Cuba but have failed because they demanded a transition from socialist system to a more democratic one. However, brothers Castro never shared this opinion and have instead led Cuba by socialist principles. The socialist regime was attempted to be overthrown in many ways but none managed to destabilize the rule of the socialist regime under Fidel. After several decades, it became clear that the change must take place within the Cuban government itself since continuous pressure simply did not function (Orenstein 2009). "The endurance of the Castro regime seemed to feed on that pressure. Instead of collapsing, the Castro regime has always been able to reconstitute itself and remain firmly in place" (Orenstein 2009: 11–12). Socialism on the island will survive until



Cuban president itself and other local stakeholders do not change it. We can say for sure that that will not take place within Cuba soon because local population does not have the freedoms needed to stand up and confront the Cuban government. Cuban citizens cannot freely choose their presidents or representatives, form political organizations nor write freely (Orenstein 2009). However, Raúl proved to be a more open-minded leader than his brother Fidel. Except for economic changes that he introduced, Raúl proved to be ready to start a peaceful rapprochement with the US (Renwick, Lee and McBride 2016).

#### 4. WHY WAS IT PRECISELY OBAMA?

Many political stars had to align for Obama's administration to break more than 50 years long deadlock between the US and Cuba. Obama's team together with enthusiastic legislators, wealthy lobbyists, and Pope Francis has decided to grab the opportunity that has opened to them. Nevertheless, it was Obama's determination that was crucial in this story. His persistence and bravery have contributed the most to this rapprochement (Kornbluh and LeoGrande 2015). During his first term in office, Obama did not make any significant moves regarding Cuba. Certain changes did take place but they have been carried out very carefully. It was in his second term in office that Obama took steps toward the rapprochement. Cuban Americans have slowly altered their attitudes toward the policy on Cuba. Those that were advocating for a hostile relationship have been replaced with more moderate Cuban-Americans who did not want to continue living in the past and were open to changes. Obama and his advisers have been aware of this transition in opinion and were ready to make a risk. Obama started off by giving a promise to Cuban Americans that limits on travel will be reduced together with cash remittances. He went a step further and in 2009 he stated: "I'm prepared to have my administration engage with the Cuban government on a wide range of issues-from drugs, migration, and economic issues, to human rights, free speech, and democratic reform" (Feinberg 2016: 10). This signaled a new beginning for both US and Cuba. Soon he fulfilled the promise given to Cuban Americans. Nevertheless, embargo remained in place and Obama showed no will of lifting it. Following careful steps toward a new era in the US-Cuban relationship, polls have started to be conducted on whether the US should pursue a new policy and whether this new policy would bear fruit. Poll results have shown that majority was in favor of changing the policy and lifting the embargo (Feinberg 2016).

##### 4.1. A TRANSITION IN CUBAN LEADERSHIP

According to Pérez, Fidel Castro has haunted the United States for decades. One man has been capable of restricting US's influence and power in Cuba. The policy of isolating Cuba was brought to penalize Castro for opposing the US. Some would go so far to say "...that the US position on Cuba is not really a policy. It's an attitude-a

blind hunger for revenge against Mr. Castro” (Pérez 2002: 251). Fidel Castro withstood numerous assassination attempts designed by the CIA and half a century of being isolated from its once biggest trading partner, the US. It was not a secret that several US presidents including Ronald Reagan and George Bush expected Castro to regret his actions and misdeeds. They blamed Castro for everything bad that has happened to them. Also, the US policy makers thought that Soviet Union was taking advantage of Cuba to impose its influence and diminish one of the US. That was what the Americans were mostly afraid of. Their greatest rival now had a military base just nearby their borders. Therefore, because of Castro, the world almost experienced a nuclear war and reconciliation during his term was perceived as impossible from both sides. However, US has imposed an embargo and completely isolated the island expecting that he will no longer endure and would ultimately change his attitudes and politics. But, Castro never had the intent to change his politics nor to succumb to the US, even in the toughest times. What lies at the heart of the problem is the refusal to subordination to the US. Castro did not want Cuba to become another puppet state of the great power. “Never before—certainly never in Latin America—had a duly constituted and recognized government mounted so strident an attack on the past policies and practices of the United States” (Pérez 2002: 230). Fidel Castro has brought into question the Monroe Doctrine by not allowing the US to exercise supremacy over Cuba. The ideology on which the US has based its control over the western hemisphere could no longer be applied to the case of Cuba (Pérez 2002).

The anti-Castro sentiment was intense throughout the US during the Cold War and later. In the eyes of the Americans, Fidel Castro was a vicious man with whom a normal person could not negotiate. For Georgie Anne Geyer:

Fidel Castro was partly responsible for the Central American immigration to the United States, the hostages in Iran, and the Persian Gulf realignment; he was implicated the assassination of President Kennedy. Without Fidel Castro there would have been no Sandinistas, no Grenada, no guerrillas in Latin America, no Marxists in Africa, no terrorists in the Middle East. (Pérez 2002: 250)

This antipathy that developed toward Castro dictated the policy toward Cuba. What was even more striking for US officials was the fact that all that evil was coming from such a small, insignificant country, which was previously known only as a tourist destination. Therefore, the US has invested numerous efforts in toppling Castro’s regime dominance on the island (Pérez 2002).

The invasion of the Bay of Pigs failed together with many attempts to overthrow the political regime on Cuba and assassinate Castro. Throughout years this has been increasing anger of American presidents who could not reconcile with Cuba winning battles against the US. President John F. Kennedy was eager to destroy Castro and his regime after Bay of Pigs did not go according to plan. They could not allow one man to challenge American prestige and status in the world. The US has served as an example to other countries around the globe and now their reputation was in decline. When the US realized that they cannot be the one that will put an end to

Fidel's presidency, they reversed their tactics so that his regime disintegrates from within. For that purpose, the embargo has been imposed. This decision would benefit the US because if the system collapses, the US would not be blamed for it, yet blame would fall on Castro and his regime (Pérez 2002). Raúl Castro replaced his brother Fidel in 2006, and in 2008 he formally became a president (Erikson and Wander 2009).

Raúl Castro came to power when Cuba was in a very difficult economic situation. Cuba's foreign debt was high, more and more young people were leaving the country and global economic crisis has impoverished the population. This prompted many reforms that were initiated by Raúl's administration (Renwick, Lee and McBride 2016). Raúl has also modified Cuba's foreign policy. Gradually, Cuba has opened itself to the world. After Raúl became president, Cuba has been visited by many heads of states and delegations and China and Cuba have become trading partners. Further, Cuba has once again become part of the Organization of American States (OAS), an organization with a task of maintaining security in the region. Cuba once again became part of this important regional organization thanks to efforts of Latin American countries. However, one of the most striking moves made by Raúl was ousting two of his ministers who had served Fidel during his rule. Fidel and Raúl diverge in the exercise of the foreign policy (Erikson and Wander 2009). Fidel has been known for his staunch sympathy to communism and disinclination toward international business. On the other hand, Raúl proved to be "a cautious pragmatist" (Feinberg 2016: 6). Fidel has always been very direct in his speeches, unlike Raúl who is not very talkative. Furthermore Raúl "is not known for having a global vision, lacks the charisma and grand sense of strategy that personified his older brother, and has seldom left Cuba since rising to occupy the presidency" (Erikson and Wander 2009: 20). In addition, brothers differ on their approach toward the US. Unlike Fidel, Raúl was the one who confronted the US and embarked into long negotiations over the terms of rapprochement.

It is quite clear that rapprochement under Fidel was not possible. The US has developed a strong resentment against him and his regime based on communist principles. Likewise, Fidel never once showed that he wanted reconciliation with the United States and it seemed like he enjoyed having a hostile relationship with Washington (Feinberg 2016). Moreover, it was always a matter of interests. The US did not want to reconcile with Cuba unless they switch to capitalism and democracy. Castro, on the other hand, never wanted to give up on communism. If they were to make peace while preserving status quo, i.e. Cuba remaining a communist based country, the US would look weak. Whereas, if Castro was to depart from his revolutionary ideas, then all the years he spent antagonizing the US would be a waste of time. For Castro, other interests prevailed over the rapprochement with the US. Yes, Cuba would have gotten again his once biggest trading partner and its economy would boost but that was not appealing enough for Fidel. However, to Fidel, it was of greater importance to preserve friendship with its eastern ally Soviet Union and to gain the favor of like-minded revolutionaries in Africa. He wanted his idea of communism to succeed and was ready to support anyone who shared his belief.

So, by supporting revolutionary movements and having the Soviet Union as an ally, Fidel Castro remained a thorn in the eyes of the US (LeoGrande and Kornbluh 2015).

Further, in 1996, when President Bill Clinton began to slightly waver economic sanctions Castro decided to stop any further rapprochement with the United States. He did that by bringing down two aircrafts that came from the United States. This decision has been justified by the fact that Cubans have warned the US several times and asked for halting their departure. That has been just one of the many examples which confirms the resentment Castro felt toward the US. Raúl decided to leave resentment aside and create a new era of US-Cuba relationship. Further, his reasons for rapprochement have been well founded. As previously mentioned, the Cuban economy has been in a bad shape when Raúl came to power. Trading again with the US, having tourist revenues together with alleviating constraints on cash remittances by Cuban Americans would significantly help the Cuban economy to get out of the crisis (Feinberg 2016).

Thus, this transition in leadership was definitely an important factor that contributed to the reversal of US policy toward Cuba under Obama's administration. Normalizing relations with the US never appeared to be on Castro's agenda. Back in 1982, Central Intelligence Agency of the US stated, "The very nature of the Castro regime precludes anything but an adversary relationship between Havana and Washington...This adversary relationship will not change as long as Castro is in power" (LeoGrande and Kornbluh 2015: 406).

## 4.2. OUTDATED POLICY

Back in 1823, the Monroe Doctrine has been brought by President James Monroe. It was stated in the Doctrine that no European power can interfere in the western hemisphere and try to influence it. Such an act would be seen as a direct threat to American national security. That also meant that the US could enjoy dominance over American states and exercise their influence in the region. "The economic and political isolation of Cuba was America's goal in the early 1960s" (Peters 2000: 5). The embargo was put into force by President John F. Kennedy in 1962. Its primary purpose was punishing Castro for choosing communism over capitalism. The fact that Cuba closely allied with the Soviets and that it backed leftist revolutions both in Africa and Latin America was in the US seen as a direct threat. And therefore, Kennedy's administration decided to block Cuba economically hoping that Castro's regime will not withstand (Peters 2000). US policymakers wanted to destroy Cuban economy with sanctions so much that people end up hungry. If people starved they would protest and wish for a regime change. Castro's government would then be toppled and a new form of government would take place on Cuba with which the US could find a common ground. The core of the policy laid in a belief that Castro and his regime will collapse from within, that Cubans themselves will sign his end. If communism collapses on its own, the US would not be blamed and revolutionary ambitions would be curtailed. Policy makers also knew that they cannot expect results in a short-run and that it will take years or even decades for a plan to suc-

ceed (Pérez 2002). Following administrations also shared Kennedy's opinion. But after 30 years it became questionable whether this policy is effective (Peters 2000).

The first time the embargo and American policy toward Cuba came into question was in the 1990s. The policy has not been put in question by just members of the Congress but also by President Nixon who has expressed the need for lifting the embargo in his last book. By the end of the decade policy has been criticized by President Clinton as well. It became evident that embargo harmed only Cuban citizens and further impoverished them, while Castro and his regime survived it. The embargo had numerous opponents within Cuba whom for the well-being of Cuban citizens sought its abolition. A year after the Soviet Union disintegrated, Cuban Catholic bishops emphasized harshness of the policy by saying: "...If what is intended with this approach is to destabilize the government by using hunger and want to pressure civic society to revolt, then the strategy is also cruel" (Peters 2000: 5). Even though regime and communist ideology on the island survived, much people thought that the collapse of Soviet's communism would eventually lead to the end of communism on Cuba as well. As the Soviet Union started falling apart, so did Cuban support for revolutionary movements due to a lack of military resources. Also, it was expected that economy will be destroyed when Soviet's help stopped arriving. Additionally, the functioning of the Cuban economy was defined by Cuban internal politics. "Socialist policies, in Cuba as elsewhere, stifle initiative, slow an economy's ability to adapt, and suppress output" (Peters 2000: 8). All of this has led to a prediction that Cuban economy will soon hit rock bottom. Administration of President Clinton and Bush Sr. wanted to accelerate the breakdown of the economy and thus have introduced the "Torricelli Bill" and "Helms-Burton Act". These acts have "tightened the Cuban embargo once again and cemented it into legislation" (Lambrecht 2015: 17).

Further, US supported immigration because they thought it would contribute to the collapse of the economy. What the US did not realize was that with easing of the immigration, all those people against Castro abandoned the country instead of doing what the US expected them to do, i.e. stand up against Castro (Pérez 2002). Even though some of the reasons for which policy has been put in the first place disappeared after the Soviet Union disintegrated, the policy endured for another 25 years. Soviets no longer represented a threat and support for guerilla movements stopped, but a policy that was introduced with the realization of these objectives remained in place. Why that was so is a question posed by many. According to Louis A. Pérez, "Its very longevity serves as the principal rationale for its continuance" (2002: 251).

#### 4.3. GROWING CRITICISM IN THE REGION

It took many decades until finally, policy changed. The US changing course on Cuba has been prompted by increasing criticism that was coming from the Latin American countries. The US reputation among Latin American states decreased because of such policy toward Cuba (Hershberg and Dolezal 2016). Obama's presidency was greeted

with great enthusiasm in the region. Already in his campaign, Obama promised that relations with Cuba will be improved. He also emphasized that “mutual respect and reciprocity” will be the basis of the relationship between the US and regional countries. Therefore, Obama’s presidency was expected to bring novelty in relations with the entire region, not just Cuba. With the time, it became evident that not much has changed in their relationship. All the prospects that have been expected did not come to light and president’s advisors for the region “were perceived weak and often imperious in their dealings with Latin American counterparts” (Hershberg and Dolezal 2016: 92).

At the Summit held in Cartagena in 2012 wrath of the regional countries went out into the open. Obama has been criticized for not inviting Cuban president Raúl Castro. Summit of the Americas in 2015 came into question when several regional presidents openly stated that they will not be present unless Raúl Castro is welcome as well. All the messages addressed to the Obama’s administration during the Summit have greatly affected Obama’s position toward Latin-American countries. Obama realized that by stubbornly continuing with the policy of isolation of Cuba, US’s credibility came into question. For Obama himself, continuation of this policy was perceived as an absurd and he had the will to change it (Hershberg and Dolezal 2016). The US’s influence in the region shrunk firstly because the US was no longer the only dominant economic power in the region. Most of the regional countries have expanded the scope of their economic partners. China arose as one of the major economical sources of funding, thereby diminishing the US’ economic presence in the region. Another factor that contributed in distancing the US from Latin American states was a political transition. Authoritarian rule has been replaced by a democracy in most of the Latin American states. New governments no longer considered the US as exemplary idol of democracy. Further, their attitude was leaning against the United States. Since Obama’s administration did not fulfill promises given during the campaign, regional states wanted to distance themselves from Washington. Consequently, the OAS which used to be the most influential regional organization has been replaced by other organizations which did not have the US as their member. No longer was OAS given the opportunity to decide about regional deadlocks. “It was an emergency meeting of the Rio Group, and not of the OAS, which addressed the military coup against Hugo Chávez in April 2002” (Hershberg and Dolezal 2016: 95). Six years later, a coup was anticipated in Bolivia and UNASUR (Unión de Naciones Sudamericanas) found a solution for it without involving the US. All of this together has significantly impacted the significance of the United States in Latin American region. The reasons the US’s influence diminished became evident after time and prompted Obama’s administration to start improving relations with its neighbors, especially with Cuba (Hershberg and Dolezal 2016).

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century when Bush was in power, maintaining good relations with the regional countries was one of the top priorities of the foreign policy of the United States. However, terrorist threat caused by 9/11 attack emerged and tossed re-engagement with the Latin American states in the background. Also,

Bush proclaimed that negotiations with Cuba can start only when Cuba ceases to be a communist country and turns into a democracy. So, Summit has opened an opportunity by which the US could regain the favor of the Latin Americans (Lambrecht 2015). The handshake between Obama and Raúl Castro at the Summit in 2015 “was depicted as a symbolic moment that should reflect the end of U.S. imperialistic involvement in the region and a fresh start with Cuba in particular and Latin America in general” (Lambrecht 2015: 37).

#### 4.4. DIFFERENT STANCE OF CUBAN-AMERICANS TOWARD US-CUBA RELATIONS

Last decade has shown a change in opinions of Cuban Americans. What changed throughout the years were reasons for their migration to the US. First generations have decided to move mainly because of being opposed to Castro, unlike the new generations that moved due to financial reasons. These economic migrants have not experienced a revolution on their own skins and they do not feel the need to be politically active. Further, they do not blame Castro for everything bad that has happened to Cuba, rather consider some features of his system, such as education to be very well conducted. As the number of older migrants declined, their political influence slowly faded, and new ideas, favorable toward Cuba have emerged (Seeds of Change in Little Havana, 2010).

Demographical and political shifts have created a basis for a change of the US policy toward Cuba. Younger generations that grew up in the US are less connected to Cuba than early exiles who grew up in Cuba and were forced to move. For them, US policy toward Cuba is not as important as it was for their parents and grandparents. They are prioritizing other issues and their stance toward rapprochement has softened. What happened is a transition from “the politics of passion to the politics of reason” (Seeds of Change in Little Havana, 2010). Cuban Americans are striving to change lives of Cubans and advocate lifting of the embargo. The policy of isolationism has been imposed in the first place to put an end to Castro’s regime, but it failed in its mission. Therefore, Cuban Americans have a history as an example of US’ poor approach which did not bring any good to Cuba or US. Decades of isolationism and “...the need to appeal to a reactionary Cuban-American voting bloc...” are not anymore an impediment for US presidents in changing the policy (Seeds of Change in Little Havana, 2010). Now that conservative perspectives of older generations have become replaced with more reasonable mindsets, President Obama was given the opportunity to normalize relations with Cuba (Seeds of Change in Little Havana, 2010). With this step, Obama has proven that the influence of the Cuban lobby has diminished and that it cannot longer threaten one’s career and pressure presidents “to play their game” (LeoGrande 2013).

#### 4.5. CHANGE IN THE US INTERESTS

The inability to change US policy toward Cuba of all the president before Obama “can be blamed on the dominating role of security and domestic political interests in creating policy towards the island during the Cold War” (Lambrecht 2015: 16). Lotte Lambrecht argues that rapprochement has not been possible since three American interests, being “economic, domestic political and security interests have defined the Cuban-American relationship from the start” (Lambrecht 2015: 51). Firstly, it was the closeness of the two states that was crucial. Cuba and the US are close neighbors divided by only 90 sea miles. What the United States found very important was the richness of natural resources that could be found in Cuba. The US wanted to use these resources that would “form an interesting export market for U.S. businesses” (Lambrecht 2015: 9).

Western European countries and Canada have attempted to reproach Cuba but were unsuccessful in changing Cuban domestic politics. Those in favor of the status quo have used their examples to support their stance. But, Obama’s administration finally grasped that a policy must be changed. Raúl has paved the way for the new policy by gradually delivering economic reforms which were welcomed in the US. Obama claimed, “I do not believe we can keep doing the same thing for over five decades and expect a different result” (Lambrecht 2015: 20). To add to this, it was not a simple thing for Obama to proclaim rapprochement and thus label a change in policy. However, Obama asserted that approach change legitimization lied in the fact that Cuba cannot represent a danger to the US security because of its size (Lambrecht 2015). Slowly from the very beginning of his presidential career, Obama took steps toward normalizing relations. These steps included “the release of political prisoners, freedom to travel, leniency towards the Church and other democratizing measures” (LeoGrande 2015: 483).

Why Obama finally after all these years changed policy toward Cuba has been explained by a simple sentence: “We know from hard-learned experience that it is better to encourage and support reform than to impose policies that will render a country a failed state” (LeoGrande 2015: 485). The idea that the US can simply impose a policy and through it control another state could not have been applied to the case of Cuba. US policymakers believed that when Cuba loses the US as its biggest trading ally it will transform into a democracy. Fidel Castro, whose revolution started with the aim of completely eradicating American influence on Cuba, managed in such difficult economic times for his country to save his regime and retain the affection of Cubans. The US, confronted with the failed policy, has now turned to rapprochement with Cuba. Since Raúl Castro took power, Cuba has made significant economic reforms that have improved the situation of the Cuban economy. Obama’s administration believes that through economic reforms Cuba will gradually transform into a democracy (LeoGrande, 2015).

“In 1994, Fidel Castro told a group of former U.S. ambassadors that he needed a two-term U.S. president to normalize relations with Cuba because no first term president would have the courage to do it” (LeoGrande and Kornbluh 2015: 397).



Obama did not have to worry about not being re-elected since his second term had just started and that is what gave him the necessary courage (LeoGrande and Kornbluh 2015). With Obama's reelection in 2012, things have started to move more rapidly. Obama got an approval from the Congress to continue with more amicable approach toward Cuba. The President was eager to handle issues with hostile governments, not just the one of Cuba, but also Iran and other. That was when Cuba became one of the top priorities of US foreign policy. It was not an easy task for President Obama to make first steps since he could not know what the consequences might be. Raúl could have proceeded the same as his brother Fidel did in 1996 and halt further efforts. Still, Cuba was not dangerous anymore for the US so Obama decided to take advantage of this opportunity and start off with a new approach. When he was making first moves toward normalizing relations with Cuba, Obama did not wait for Raúl to make moves as well, yet he moved forward without his response (Feinberg 2016). That was one of the lessons that Obama has learned. Two of his predecessors, Jimmy Carter and Henry Kissinger have tried to normalize relations believing that it will succeed using reciprocal actions. But, the problem was that both presidents have set the terms that have proved to be unacceptable by Fidel. Both requested termination of helping the revolutionaries in Africa which Havana refused to do. Obama has also started off by expecting that reciprocal moves will be made but soon he realized that such approach is not working and has continued to make moves on his own. Basically, whenever the US has demanded from Cuba to change something it did not work. For instance, Carter, arguing that that is the only way for the two countries to make peace has explicitly demanded the release of US prisoners in Cuba. Fidel did not do it, yet a year after "Castro released more than three thousand political prisoners in response to Carter's human rights policy" (LeoGrande and Kornbluh 2015: 410). Therefore, Obama decided to make moves without expecting something in return.

Luckily, Raúl has accepted Obama's initiative and has openly stated that Cuba and the US should establish a purposeful conversation. He emphasized was that talks must be based "on an equal footing, with absolute respect for our sovereignty and for the right of the Cuban people to their self-determination" (LeoGrande 2011). Raúl wanted Cuba to be perceived as an independent state no longer in need of anyone's help, especially not the one of the US. From the very beginning of Raúl presidency, he has shown inclinations toward normalizing relations. What followed was series of actions from both sides made with the aim to repair their relations (LeoGrande 2011).

#### 4.6. THE LOSS OF CUBAN ECONOMIC PARTNER

Venezuela and Cuba have been politically and economically linked for years. Cuba has been sending medicine experts, professors to Venezuela in exchange for "deeply subsidized oil supplies" that Venezuela sends to Cuba (Piccone and Trinkunas 2014: 1). Politically, Hugo Chávez, former President of Venezuela and Fidel Castro have had a very good relationship and Chávez supported Fidel's revolution. The good relation-

ship between the two presidents contributed to the closeness of the two countries. Nevertheless, their interdependence has not been ideal, yet problems were hidden beneath the surface. Cuba relies on Venezuela economically more than Venezuela does on Cuba since the exchanged goods make up more of the Cuban GDP than of the Venezuelan GDP. Further, Venezuela had the financial means to help Cuba economically at the beginning of Chávez's presidency, in the 2000s, as oil prices rose, unlike when the country was stuck in crisis in 2014. When the crisis began, all the negative aspects of their interdependence started to create problems in their bilateral relations (Piccone and Trinkunas 2014). Additionally, President Chávez's death in 2013 has further contributed to the deterioration of the relationship. With the economic crisis and political changes, the future of their relationship became uncertain (Jacobs 2015).

Above mentioned reasons have contributed to the US-Cuba rapprochement. Since Cuban biggest economic partner has been stuck in a crisis, Raúl had to seek for a new economic partner. Castro brothers never knew how to govern the state economy independently. That is why Cuba relied on the assistance of the Soviet Union for decades and after it disintegrated, Venezuela became Cuban economic partner. As the Soviet Union collapsed, Cuban economy without the aid that Moscow was sending, has experienced great economic losses. Further, the same thing repeated with Venezuela (Jacobs 2015). As the embargo was one of the reasons that completely disabled the progress of the Cuban economy, Raúl decided to normalize relations with the US with the hope that US Congress will eventually lift the embargo (Kornbluh and LeoGrande 2015). So, it can be said that the Cuban need for a new economic partner was what pushed Cuba into rapprochement with the US. It was now in the Cuban interest to improve the standing of the economy.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Answering to the question of why has Obama finally succeeded in breaking the deadlock between the US and Cuba after numerous failed attempts was not easy at all. The two states have had and still have a very complex relationship which is affected by numerous factors. In this work, I argued that the rapprochement between Cuba and the US came due to changes in interests, ideas and identities from both sides, which constitute basic principles of a constructivist approach.

Firstly, Cuba stopped being a security threat to the US since it no longer supported Marxists guerilla movements and the Soviet Union, i.e. Russia was no longer trying to impose its influence in the western hemisphere through friendship with Cuba (Peters 2000). When the US no longer felt threatened from Cuba, the island was no longer interesting to the US. Embargo was in place, Cuban-American community would not allow for policy to change and Fidel Castro nor US presidents showed interest to change the relationship. It was only after Obama realized that it needs to improve the US standing in the region that the policy finally changed. Since the US influence has diminished in the region, the need for improving ties with Cuba

appeared on the agenda of Obama's administration. It was now in the US interest to normalize relations with its once biggest enemy since it could not afford to lose more influence in the region (Hershberg and Dolezal 2016). Criticism was not only present from the Latin American states, but from the other world players. After rapprochement has been publicly announced, European Union representative, the Pope, and other influential individuals have expressed their contentment with this kind of outcome (Hirst 2013).

Additionally, what has changed has been the stance of Cuban Americans. Older generations' influence slowly faded away and so did the firm position against the rapprochement between Cuba and the US. With time, the more moderate community has been formed and it allowed for US President Barack Obama to change US policy toward Cuba. Older generations have for decades used their financial power to influence US policymakers and US presidential candidates. It served to their benefit that Florida, where most Cuban-Americans reside, is a swing state so it was in each presidential candidate's interests to meet the wishes of the community and win a majority of votes (LeoGrande 2015). However, Obama, already in the second term with no need to win again the elections, and with the more open-minded community has been able to pass the new policy toward Cuba. Apart from the Cuban Americans, both Cubans and the US citizens advocated for normalization of relations (Norman 2016).

Rapprochement has also been anticipated by the US understanding that the policy was outdated. It no longer served the original purpose. The policy was introduced with the aim of ousting Castro and communist regime, but none of the two was achieved in a more than 50 years' period so it became obvious that the policy has been unsuccessful. For that matter, Obama has decided to switch from a hostile policy to a friendly one (Peters 2000).

In Cuba, the leadership has changed. Even though the family on power was still the same, Fidel was replaced by a more open-minded brother Raúl who has proved to be ready to make some changes (Pérez 2002). When his term started in 2008, the Cuban economy has been in a crisis and he has made economic reforms that improved the status of Cuban economy (Renwick, Lee and McBride 2016). And within next few years, the rapprochement came together with benefits for Cuban tourism, remittances and overall life for Cubans living on the island. Raúl has also acknowledged that it is no longer in Cuban interest to be in a bad relationship with its neighbor. Cuba has lost its biggest ally Russia, and Venezuela that has been economically helping Cuba lately has experienced an economic crisis (Jacobs 2015). That has given Raúl a reason to re-enter into the alliance with the US.

Lastly, it was certainly that the US understood that Cuba cannot be subordinated to the US. The small island has proven that in the last 50 years. Even though the US is a world power who has changed political systems in other countries, Cubans have demonstrated that this is not the case in their country. Identities of both countries have changed over time. On one side, the US, could no longer dominate and set conditions to other countries because Cuba has resisted this. And Fidel has shown

to be a stronger than it seemed and proved to be capable of managing the country without the US help (Pérez 2002).

All the above-mentioned factors gave Obama the possibility to break more than a half a century long deadlock between the US and Cuba. If these changes took place earlier, rapprochement would have been possible under Obama's predecessors. Nevertheless, the changes combined with Obama's determines have yielded the changes in US-Cuba relationship. But above all that, there is a sentence that in my opinion explains it all: "peaceful coexistence made more sense than perpetual antagonism" (Kornbluh and LeoGrande 2015).

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## ZBLIŽAVANJE SAD-a I KUBE

Josipa Rajevac

### SAŽETAK

Nakon više od pedeset godina zategnutih odnosa, Sjedinjene Američke Države i Kuba uspostavile su diplomatske i ekonomske odnose. Zbližavanje su 17. prosinca 2014. proglasili predsjednici Raúl Castro i Barack Obama. Zašto je baš za vrijeme administracije Baracka Obame došlo do približavanja? Zašto su baš predsjednik Obama i njegova administracija uspjeli ostvariti ono što prethodni američki predsjednici nisu mogli? Na kakve su sve prepreke u mijenjaju politike prema Kubi nailazili Obamini prethodnici? Cilj ovog rada bio je odgovoriti na ta pitanja. Osim promjena interesa kako kubanske, tako i američke strane, dvije su zemlje promijenile međusobnu percepciju tijekom godina. Ova dva čimbenika polazišne su točke konstruktivističkog pristupa kojim je dokazano da su to bili glavni razlozi koji su omogućili Obami i njegovoj administraciji normalizaciju odnosa s Kubom.

Ključne riječi: zbližavanje, Barack Obama, Fidel Castro, politika SAD-a.

