



Robert Schuman



European Union Center/ Jean Monnet Chair

Future Relations Between the U.S. and Cuba: Impact on the EU

Dr. Andy S. Gomez and Monica C. Pellerano

**UNIVERSITY
OF MIAMI**



Vol. 19, No. 4

April 2019

Published with the support of the European Commission

The Jean Monnet/ Robert Schuman Paper Series

The Jean Monnet/Robert Schuman Paper Series is produced by the Jean Monnet Chair and the European Union Center of the University of Miami.

These monographic papers analyze ongoing developments within the European Union as well as recent trends which influence the EU's relationship with the rest of the world. Broad themes include, but are not limited to:

- The Lisbon Treaty
- The Euro zone crisis
- Immigration and cultural challenges
- Security threats and responses
- The EU's neighborhood policy
- The EU and Latin America
- The EU as a model and reference in the world
- Relations with the United States
- Consequences of Brexit

These topics form part of the pressing agenda of the EU and represent the multifaceted and complex nature of the European integration process. These papers also seek to highlight the internal and external dynamics which influence the workings of the EU and its relationship with the rest the world.

European Union Center

University of Miami
1300 Campo Sano Building, 220C
Coral Gables, FL 33124-2231
Phone: 305-284-3266
Fax: (305) 284 4406
Web: www.miami.edu/eucenter

Jean Monnet Chair Staff

Joaquín Roy (Director)
Beverly Barrett (Associate Editor)
Melanie Goergmaier (Assistant Editor)
Maxime Larivé (Research Associate)
María Lorca (Research Associate)

Florida International University
Markus Thiel (Director, FIU)

International Jean Monnet Editorial Advisors:

Philippe de Lombaerde, UNU/CRIS, Brugge, Belgium
Carlos Hakansson, Universidad de Piura, Perú
Kurt Hübner, University of British Columbia, Vancouver
Finn Laursen, University of Southern Denmark
John McCormick, Indiana University, Purdue
Félix Peña, Universidad Nacional de Tres de Febrero, Buenos Aires, Argentina
Beatriz Pérez de las Heras, Universidad de Deusto, Bilbao
Manuel Porto, University of Coimbra, Portugal
Lorena Ruano, CIDE, Mexico
Eric Tremolada, Universidad del Externado de Colombia, Bogotá, Colombia
Roberto Domínguez, Suffolk University, Boston
Francesc Granell, University of Barcelona

The Future Relations Between the U.S. and Cuba and its Impact on the EU

Dr. Andy S. Gomez and Mónica C. Pellerano

Paper presented at the seminar on
“Latin American challenges: the role of the European Union”,
held at the University of Miami

Cuba has long maintained the unfavorable distinction of being the sole Latin American nation to lack a formal bilateral trade agreement with the United States of America (USA) and the European Union (EU). The island-nation of Cuba has endured a condition of isolation very much out of line with its geographical positioning. Its proximity to the United States of America (USA) makes it a very desirable option in that it provides “a chance to advance [America’s] strategic interests in a variety of areas, including counternarcotics and counterterrorism cooperation, aviation and maritime security, disaster relief, human trafficking and migration” (Piccone, 2015, p. 1). Consequently, upon the rise of Fidel Castro to power in 1959, every American President has attempted to negotiate with Cuba, albeit with limited success. Since Raul Castro’s rise to power in 2008, the assumption by many in Washington D.C., was that this would mark the beginning of new possibilities for engagement and the normalization of relations between the USA and Cuba. In 2009, the new Cuban leader, Raul Castro, sent a message to U.S. President Barack Obama that “He was ready to talk to the U.S. government about every issue” (LeoGrande and Kornbluh, 2015, P. 381). Coupled with this declaration by Castro, the announcement on December 17, 2014 (D-17) by President Obama that the U.S. would establish diplomatic relations with Cuba created hopes for a “New Era” between both countries. The election of Donald Trump in 2016 has created a shift in circumstances and assessments for the future of U.S. policy towards Cuba. Thus, the question now facing the Trump administration and consequently being evaluated in this paper is: Do the risks outweigh the benefits of engaging with a country under a totalitarian rule which shows no signs of political change nor inclination to relinquish any degree of economic or political control?

Historical Engagements

President Barack Obama’s D-17 (2014) announcement was a considerable shift in U.S. strategy. Before then, engagement between U.S. and Cuba had been marked by reoccurring instances of friction and overreach into domestic affairs. Although former presidents, both

Democrats and Republicans, had made attempts at establishing relations between the two nations, efforts had proved unsuccessful in either their negotiations and/or effectuations. This was in part due to the proclivity by the Americans to negotiate from a position of unwavering power with their Cuban counterparts. Outside of these moments of diplomatic engagements and respites in efforts, relations between Cuba and United States have more often been characterized by conflict and interposition.

Disagreements between these two nations emanate to a large extent from the vast ideological differences between both. Especially in terms of their respective conceptualizations of sovereignty and the venues for its exercise and manifestation, the two find it hard to find a common ground. Where USA touts democratic governance, Cuba sustains a position on sovereignty most commonly understood as ‘totalitarian’. The difference thus revolves around the question of sovereignty and the assertion of legitimate rule. It has become the case that, “over time, a state’s respect for universal human rights became an important element of the legitimacy of state sovereignty” (Piccone and Miller, 2016, p. 2). And although “Cuba has committed to and has affirmed [...the] 1993 Vienna Declaration and Program of Action,” it has not as of yet demonstrated a capacity nor desire to uphold such (Piccone and Miller, 2016, p. 3).

Historically, Cuban engagements with the European Union had not seen themselves unaffected by the difference in ideology creating such vast expanses between it and the EU. Consider, for instance, the EU’s Common Position, adopted in 1996. “It was formally repealed by the Council on 6 December 2016, in parallel with the decision to sign the [Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement (PDCA)]” (Tvevad, 2017, p. 7). The twenty-year stance on Cuba originated from the continuation of human rights abuses at the hands of the regime. It stipulated, amongst a number of other principles, that “the EU’s objective in its relations with Cuba was to encourage a transition to pluralist democracy and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms [... also] full cooperation with Cuba would depend on improvements in human rights and political freedoms” (Tvevad, 2017, p. 7). Although this was the position undertaken by the Council, it is worth mentioning that individual Member States still sought ways to engage with Cuba politically and economically.

Contemporary Conditions

When President Obama took office, a group of diplomats and academics began drafting a possible new policy towards Cuba by the USA. Under Obama, the United States was party to the aspiration to foster global integrative practices and actualities. There was a recognition of, and desire for, the attainment of economic integration as a venue for the normalization of relations between states, since it is a manner of interaction which more easily lends itself to restraint, so as to not pose a threat to sovereignty. By Joseph S. Nye Jr’s differentiations between types of power, President Obama’s was a smart power, albeit leaning more towards the soft rather than hard end of the spectrum, as it was characterized by cooperation rather than the pronouncement of conditions (and the enforcement of these oft by force and/or coercion). Unlike hard power, soft power at least pretends to allow for a degree of self-determination, having a more fluid view on sovereignty more readily aligned with efforts towards economic integration, since it does not decree/demand that power is lost upon entering into a regional/global cooperative, allowing in turn for the gaining of legitimacy. The value of such legitimacy in the quest to become a player in the global arena (and in the quest to reap economic gains from such) is not lost on his Cuban

counterpart, Raúl Castro, who has made clear that he understands that cooperation and dialogue matters. “‘Our relations are like a bridge in war-time,’ Raúl Castro observed, describing the damage done by years of hostility—damage that both countries will have to repair. ‘It is not a bridge that can be reconstructed easily, as fast as it was destroyed. It takes a long time. If both parties reconstruct their part of the bridge, we can shake hands without winners or losers.’” (LeoGrande and Kornbluh, 2015, p. 5). Similarly, in addressing the Organization of American States (OAS) in 2009, President Obama had articulated that “The U.S. seeks a new beginning with Cuba. I know there’s a longer journey that must be traveled to overcome decades of mistrust, but there are critical steps that we can take toward a new day” (NBC News, 2009). The thing with bridges as it is with journeys, though, is that their most challenging aspect is not their commencement, but rather their continuation.

President Trump would be hard-pressed to deny that much of what is motivating him and his policies is the desire to erode and undo Obama’s legacy. Since assuming the presidency, one is lead to hypothesize that President Trump’s foreign policy leans more to the ‘hard power’ end of the spectrum. Trump’s foreign policy is built upon a more traditional view of power and of sovereignty, finding value especially in territorial and/or military manifestations, as they are a tangible, measurable. Not surprisingly, such views have resulted in more contentious interactions with the Cuban government, as they are most commonly associated with the regime’s own views. Realpolitik calls for a constant balancing and measuring against others’ capacities, therein determining and asserting the expanse of one’s own.

The obstacles to the attainment of relations with Cuba by the USA are not purely metaphysical. Security implications were made especially pertinent to the conversation recently because of the sonic or acoustic attacks in Cuba on American diplomats and private persons. Late 2016, “At least 21 people working at the US’ embassy in Cuba [began to notice and report the symptoms of] health problems, ranging from mild brain trauma and deafness to dizziness and nausea” (BBC News, 2017). Following the determination (by the White House) that Cuba had failed to protect its emissaries, the American government decided to pull out all of the non-essential personnel from the American Embassy in Havana. The Trump administration as well expelled Cuban diplomats from their embassy in Washington D.C. and issued a travel advisory warning against travel to Cuba. Most recently, in the latest round of votes this past Wednesday (November 1st, 2017), the United States voted against the United Nations’ (UN) resolution condemning the embargo (the U.S. was one of two nations, the other being Israel, to vote against the resolution). This year’s vote is a reversal to, and a clear indication of, worsening relations between Cuba and the U.S. And stands in stark difference to the Obama administration’s abstention in the previous round (2016).

Future Relations

It can be speculated that under the leadership of President Donald Trump, USA has taken a stance of isolationism and, if he is to keep in line with his own rhetoric, an approach to negotiations which may have the ill-effect of undermining previous agreements as well as the United States’ commitment to upholding them (as is already the case with the conditions for its participation within the NATO and the UN, to name a few). Since he insists on ‘bargaining from a position of power’, he is thus unlikely to make concessions of a meaningful scope, as would be necessary in relations with Cuba. And not only so, but consenting to the alterations upon the

embargo made by Obama would as well undermine his desire to ‘bring American corporations back to American territory’, as it would invariably signify his support for American corporations to seek manufacturing capabilities and markets on foreign territory. The European Union sees an opportunity to be had in this approach to foreign relations and specifically in the USA’s attitude towards Cuba.

One can observe, for instance, the case of the Mariel Special Economic and Development Zone. Located 28 miles West of the Cuban capital of Havana, the approximately 115,000 acre-zone was envisioned as “the beginning of a bustling commercial city built on high-tech, advanced manufacturing and sustainable development” (Whitefield, 23 October 2017, p. 1). Approximately 27 foreign companies have had their projects approved and a number have begun construction. Some EU Member States, such as the Netherlands, Spain, France, and Belgium, are amongst the number already present or finalizing negotiations in Mariel. The zone, which contains a port (made significant particularly during the 1980 Mariel Boatlift), was inaugurated on November 2013. “[Raúl] Castro [has] called the Mariel complex the most important project carried out by the Cuban Revolution in the past 50 years” (Whitefield, 23 October 2017, p. 2). To this day no American projects have been formally approved in Mariel, although a number of applications have been submitted for review and are pending approval. These proceedings, however, are now finding themselves inhibited by the fact that although they have yet to be released, “The Trump administration also is writing new regulations that are expected to make it more difficult for American [companies] to do business with [...] Cuba” (Whitefield, 23 October 2017, p. 5). So not only were corporations unsure about how to proceed with investing in Cuba under Obama’s modifications to U.S. laws by executive order, but now they find that what little progress had been made is threatened by the deterioration of relations between the nations (as well as by the velocity at which the changes are taking place).

Options For, and Hinderances to, Engagement(s)

This paper seeks to undertake an evaluation of the risks versus benefits associated with engaging a totalitarian regime. And in doing so, is departing from the assumption that the USA seeks to engage with Cuba. The manner of such engagement, however, as of yet remains to be understood. It must thus be mentioned that such a quest leaves little room for the realization and contemplation that there are other options available to the participants involved. For the sake of clarity, one can differentiate between three types of ‘engagements’, which we will hereafter refer to as: positive engagement, negative engagement, and disengagement.

The normalization of relations with Cuba, as was the agenda under President Obama, would have constituted a positive engagement, as it sought to establish a common agenda as well as relations and exchanges. Under the Trump administration, on the other hand, the door has been (re)opened to what we are deeming ‘negative’ engagement. Engaging negatively is here more readily understood as the continued undermining of the Castro regime, as well as the escalation of conflicts between both nations. Taking into account the circumstances at hand as well as the commonly-held and flaunted views by the current American president, it can be speculated that negative engagement seems to be the most likely course of action. If we are to consider the influence wrought by the private sector, then the outcome may be different, as there may be considerable interest by such to engage with Cuba (as was the case with the Mariel Zone). However, the question of ‘whether Cuba wants U.S. foreign investment or just its tourist

dollars?’, does remain unanswered. Another course of action to be considered is disengagement or more simply put, the maintaining of current conditions. This would perhaps be the most unlikely of scenarios to play out, as it would call for both parties to disengage entirely, and to simply maintain relations indirectly. In effect, going back to the “Cold War” days, or sustaining the notion that those antagonisms never thawed.

Whether it be positive or negative, if engagement of any kind is to take place, then one must as well consider the possible hinderances to such. For instance, it has become clear from previous undertakings, that negotiations must depart from a point of mutual respect (or an approximation to it) in order to sustain dialogue. And not only so, but the Cuban government is no longer at the disadvantageous position it had been previous to its negotiations with both the U.S. (under Obama) and with the EU. As such, it is no longer departing from the position of weakness the immediacy of its economic needs had dictated, and can be more critical of the conditions upon which engagements may be made contingent. Also in line with contemplations of how monetary matters motivate political affairs, one must ask what it would take in order to make American investment in Cuba more attractive? Upon the announcement of the adjustments to U.S. policy, American corporations have sought to establish ties with Cuba, but not to the degree that might have been expected. “The regulations announced in January 2016 [...] were a useful next step, but much more remains to be done to attract businesses and assure U.S. [industries] of when and how they can do business without running afoul of regulations currently written”, especially in light of the U.S.’ recent vote against the aforementioned UN resolution (Piccone and Miller, 2016, p. 9). It is also the case that although labor in Cuba is assuredly cheaper than in United States, and that the wages laborers receive are quite low, “[...] Cuba is not considered a low-wage destination and that is a problem for investors” (Whitefield, 23 October 2017, p. 8). All of this, however, takes for granted that either party is willing to (re)establish relations, in spite of the vast ideological expanse between the two and the violences effectuated against each other (historically and contemporarily).

There is also the matter of Cuba’s unlikeliness to relinquish any form of economic control. Although this may be considered a subcategory of former considerations, it also plays into the question of human rights. Integration into the global market coupled with foreign investment would indeed serve (to some degree) to revive the Cuban civil society, but this does not change the fact that both power and capital remain largely concentrated at the top. One can always hope and argue that such a structure may start to find itself chipped away at by the empowerment of smaller actors as well as the infiltration of ideologies (particularly those in line with liberal, pluralist democratic practices and institutions), but we must also entertain the notion that the opposite may be true (at least for a significant amount of time).

As previously mentioned, one must also keep in mind that all conclusions herein drawn and many of the considerations being prompted are based, to a large extent, on speculations on what are the motivating factors for all pertinent groups. Although we can convincingly argue that President Trump is seeking to appease a small, conservative minority in South Florida, the reality is that outside of that, the United States’ agenda remains unclear. This is not only a complicated point of departure, but it as well poses a risk for negotiations moving forward, as they would not only be built upon faulty foundations, but thereafter would experience no assurances that they could/would be maintained by subsequent administrations (and not even by this same mercurial administration). “Cuba-US relations are at a low ebb once again, almost completely erasing all the goodwill built up over the Obama presidency in a matter of months [...] The only glimmer of

hope is that [diplomatic] relations haven't been broken altogether and that the Cubans reiterated their willingness to work with the Americans to find a solution" (BBC News, 2017). The degree as to which either party is willing to interact (and integrate), however, also remains undefined.

Do the Risks Outweigh the Benefits?

So, do the risks outweigh the benefits? Well, that depends on the agenda. As to what it is the U.S. wants, either the administration does not know what they want (other than undoing everything Obama has achieved), or that is, in fact, their agenda: a return to reactionary politics and the employment of hard power. The question of 'what it is the private sector wants' must also be given the weight it merits, especially when discussing a hyper-capitalist economy such as the USA's, where private money moves politics and policies. We must also look towards what is motivating Cuba. Of course there are economic desires and necessities for growth which must be met, but there is also the very clear desire to maintain power at the hands of the established few, to not relinquish any control (economic or political).

This brings us to our next question: What are the risks of the U.S. engaging with Cuba? There is an undeniable geographical significance to Cuba's location in respect to the United States. Disengaging with Cuba would not only allow for the EU to occupy this opening, but it would also allow for countries with values unaligned with America's, or simply anti-American sentiments, to gain access to the U.S.' backyard. In light of the recent sonic attacks, there are security implications of a more domestic quality that must be taken into account. The normalization of relations, and even the attempt at interaction, would at some point necessitate the exchange of personnel. How would the security of these individuals be assured by either party? Speaking of political parties, any and all attempts to normalize (or initiate) relations with Cuba would prompt the intensification/deepening of political cleavages in the United States, even within a single political party (i.e. Republicans). When it comes to Cuba, sentiments run deep and convictions remain stout.

There is also the case of Raúl Castro's yet undefined and underdefined new model of 'prosperous socialism'. The doubts about the definition and clauses of this new model are significant, since these would dictate the manner in which the citizens of Cuba may see themselves impacted by interactions with the U.S. and the EU. Here, both 'superpowers' run the very real risk of serving to strengthen the regime. Cuba has also, as aforementioned, made very clear that the normalization and even the initiation of relations (both economic and diplomatic) cannot be contingent on conditions placed upon the Cuban regime. At this point, again, both the U.S. and the EU run the very real risk of engaging solely to the benefit of the regime, allowing for (and perhaps even sponsoring) the Cuban peoples' further disenfranchisement.

Although the risks are many and considerable, there do exist a number of benefits to engaging with Cuba. The establishment of relations, and the iteration that a normalization of relations with Cuba is desirable for the U.S., would serve to maintain the legitimacy of the USA's word and its commitment to it abroad. Engaging with Cuba would reassert the value of a U.S. proclamation and promise to an agreement, reaffirming that such supersede partisanship and transitions of power. For the current administration, there is also the consideration to be had of bringing in voters who had found themselves formerly alienated by the rhetoric of isolationism. There is as well the contemplation of expedition and potential for diversification of trade and

trade routes. There would be a reduction or elimination of the waiting period for transportation of goods (goods transported by freight which must make their way through Cuba would experience a significant reduction in waiting time). Also, the United States' role in the global scheme would be (re)affirmed. Finally, one must recognize that economic integration and its unavoidable social dimensionality would have a role to play in the prompting of a political transition, mainly the dismantling of Cuba's totalitarian regime. The presence of foreign actors and the injection of foreign capital would to some degree "[benefit] the privately-operated segments of the Cuban [economy], and strengthen the emerging Cuban middle class" (Trinkunas and Feinberg, 2017, p. 2). It would at some point, and to some degree, serve to reaffirm and therein embolden and empower the growing Cuban civil society.

Closing Points

It is curious that with the number of dissidents' arrests being higher now under Raúl than under Fidel, that both the USA under President Obama and the EU have chosen this moment to engage with Cuba, and especially to do so with so little by way of conditions. These comparable approaches just serve to illustrate that there is some recognition that former strategies of engagement with Cuba, and the prompting of political change therein, have failed. And although this is a promising start if the end goal of these interactions is the normalization of relations, it must be constantly revisited and maintained. Herein lies much of the challenge that is the negotiating of foreign affairs. The reality remains that, even if President Trump loosens the U.S. economic policies towards Cuba, one can argue that economic transition does not guarantee political changes. And so far, Cuba has not shown any signs of changing their political system.

Bibliography

- BBC News. "US Cuba: Washington expels diplomats over 'acoustic attacks'". *BBC*. 4 October 2017. Online publication. <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-41490357>>.
- Grieger, Gisela. "At a glance: EU-Cuba Agreement". *European Parliament*. European Parliamentary Research Service. July 2017. Online publication. <[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2017/607279/EPRS_ATA\(2017\)607279_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2017/607279/EPRS_ATA(2017)607279_EN.pdf)>.
- Ikenberry, G. John. "Capsule Review: Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics". *Foreign Affairs*. May/June 2004 Issue. Online publication. <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/reviews/capsule-review/2004-05-01/soft-power-means-success-world-politics>>.
- Lederer, Edith M. "U.S. Votes Against UN Resolution Condemning Cuba Embargo". *Bloomberg*. 1 November 2017. Online publication. <<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-11-01/urgent-us-votes-against-un-resolution-condemning-us-embargo-on-cuba>>.
- LeoGrande, William M. and Kornbluh, Peter. *Back Channel to Cuba: The Hidden History of Negotiations Between Washington and Havana*. Published by The University of North Carolina Press. 1 November 2015. Updated paperback edition.
- NBC News. "Obama: U.S. seeks 'new beginning' with Cuba: Organization of American States to cote on readmitting communist nation". *NBC News*. 17 April 2009. Online publication. <http://www.nbcnews.com/id/30261514/ns/world_news-americas/t/obama-us-seeks-new-beginning-cuba/#.WfkzQmhSyM8>.
- Nye Jr., Joseph S. *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. Published by Public Affairs. 27 April 2005. New edition.
- Piccone, Ted. "United States-Cuba normalizations: Strategic implications for U.S. national security". 8 April 2015. *Brookings Institution*. Online publication. <<https://www.brookings.edu/research/united-states-cuba-normalizations-strategic-implications-for-u-s-national-security/>>.
- Piccone, Ted and Miller, Ashley. "Cuba, the U.S., and the concept of sovereignty: Toward a common vocabulary?". 19 December 2016. *Brookings Institution*. Online publication. <<https://www.brookings.edu/research/cuba-the-u-s-and-the-concept-of-sovereignty-toward-a-common-vocabulary/>>.
- Trinkunas, Harold and Feinberg, Richard E. "Reckless hostility toward Cuba damages America's interests". 10 October 2017. *Brookings Institution*. Online publication. <<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2017/10/10/reckless-hostility-toward-cuba-damages-americas-interests/>>.
- Tvevad, Jesper. "In-Depth Analysis: EU-Cuba relations: a new chapter begins". *European Parliament*. Directorate-General for External Policies: Policy Department. 18 July 2017. PDF. <[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2017/570485/EXPO_IDA\(2017\)570485_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2017/570485/EXPO_IDA(2017)570485_EN.pdf)>.
- Whitefield, Mimi. "Mariel is Cuba's big industrial gamble. Could U.S. companies be among investors?". *Miami Herald*. 23 October 2017. Online publication. <<http://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/world/americas/cuba/article180057406.html>>.

Whitefield, Mimi. "Voto en la ONU saca a relucir renovada hostilidad entre Cuba y EEUU". *El Nuevo Herald*. 1 November 2017. Online publication. < <http://www.elnuevoherald.com/noticias/estados-unidos/article182163211.html>>.

Dr. Andy S. Gomez currently serves as the Interim Director of the Institute for Cuban and Cuban-American Studies. He also serves as the Assistant Provost, Dean of International Studies, and Senior Fellow in Cuban Studies at U.M.

Mónica C. Pellerano is a recent graduate from Syracuse University, having attained a B.A. in International Relations. She is currently conducting a research internship at the Institute for Cuban and Cuban-American Studies.