

Cuba and the US, a Different Scene Three Years Later

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Millions of people in Cuba and the United States saw with optimism the events of December 17, 2014, when both nations announced the beginning of a process of normalization of relations that today is slowed down.

On that day, Cuban President Raul Castro highlighted the willingness to hold a 'respectful dialogue with the US government, based on sovereign equality, to deal with the most diverse issues in a reciprocal manner, without detriment to national independence and self-determination of our peoples.'

Only two days ago the Caribbean nation showed a similar will, since the director general of the U.S. Division in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Cuba, Josefina Vidal, said that her country continues interested in working in favor of better relations with the northern country.

However, Washington's disposition changed since President Donald Trump's arrival at the White House.

The United States is changing its relations with the people of Cuba and making the most significant changes in our policy in more than 50 years. We will end an antiquated approach that for decades has not been able to promote our interests,

former President Barack Obama (2009-2017) said three years ago.

But his successor, under the influence of some Cuban-American members of Congress, decided to resume the path of that 'antiquated approach' criticized by Obama.

Until last January 20, the day of Trump's inauguration, Cuba and the United States reached 22 bilateral instruments in areas of common interest.

In addition, the embassies of the two countries in their respective capitals were reopened, exchanges increased in cultural, academic and scientific areas, and the number of American visitors to the island skyrocketed, despite the continuation of Washington restrictions that prevent tourism.

Those advances began to recede when on June 16, in a Florida theater, the Republican ruler pointed out that the direction of his administration with respect to the neighboring territory would be very different from that of the previous government.

'With immediate effect, I am canceling the completely unilateral treatment of the last administration, ' he said that day in the city of Miami before an unrepresentative group of Cubans whom the president addressed as if they embodied all those born on the island.

Although polls on the issue showed the majority support of the American people for normalization, Trump signed the National Security Presidential Memorandum on Strengthening the Policy of the United States towards Cuba.

This document announced future restrictions on travel by the Americans to the Caribbean territory and further obstacles to economic, commercial, and financial transactions between the two countries.

These new limitations were finalized on November 9, when the State, Commerce and Treasury departments began to apply 'coordinated actions' to limit trade and travel to Cuba.

As of that date, persons subject to US jurisdiction are prohibited from conducting direct financial transactions with some 180 Cuban entities and sub-entities, including five business groups, 83 hotels, two travel agencies and five marinas.

The trips, in as much, are only allowed for the 12 existing categories from before, none with tourist aims, but the educative individual visits 'people-to-people' without academic character were also eliminated, and the stays must be backed by an American organization.

These measures were added to others previously adopted, which damaged the

work in the respective embassies and of Cubans living in both countries.

Such chapter of the relations between the two territories has had tinges of sensationalism, mystery, and some came to call it science fiction when officials of the North American diplomatic legation in Cuba reported health problems of origin until now unknown.

After knowing that news in August, and without knowing the causes of the reported symptoms or details of what happened, several US media reported the theory that these people were victims of some kind of sonic attack.

Although at first, the State Department referred to the incident as health incidents, then it also began to use the term of attacks, and as a reaction, it reduced its personnel in Havana, stopped issuing visas there and expelled 15 Cuban diplomats from Washington DC.

All these events leave the relations between the two neighboring nations in conditions very different from those expected three years ago, and perhaps the most important thing of this moment is the persistence of many people in the United States interested in continuing the course initiated back then.

Several voices rose up against the new restrictions and condemned their political character, intended to please a group of members of Congress.

'No one wins with this terrible new policy, it is simply punitive. It damages Americans and Cubans equally,' Democratic Congresswoman Barbara Lee said in November, who, with that phrase, conveyed the same opinion that many US sectors have.

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