Normalization of U.S.–Cuban Relations

The End of the 'Wet Foot, Dry Foot' Policy – the End of the Cold War?

Lucia Argüellová

After the 1959 triumph of Cuban revolution and before the 2017 U.S. policy change that ended the preferential treatment of Cuban arrivals, the U.S. approach to Cuban migrants and refugees reflected U.S. foreign policy goals locked into the Cold War mind-set. This article argues that over a five-decade-long hostility and the subsequent normalization of U.S.-Cuban relations played a crucial role in the push-pull framework of Cuban exodus. It interprets the U.S. open-door policy favouring Cuban immigrants as an inherent component of the U.S.-Cuba policy that has sought to destabilize Cuba. This article also asks whether the U.S.-Cuban rapprochement and the 2017 policy change could signal the end of the Cold War between the two historical foes.

Keywords: Cuba, United States, migration, foreign policy, Cold War

Introduction

When in January 2017—just a few days before the end of his second presidential term—President Obama announced the end of the so-called 'wet foot, dry foot' policy, which popularly served as a synonym to preferential treatment of Cuban arrivals in the United States, prospective Cuban emigrants as well as Cubans waiting for entry at the

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U.S.-Mexican border felt a significant dose of resentment. Until this historic decision, the 'wet foot, dry foot' rule of 1996 was implemented in tandem with provisions of the Cuban Adjustment Act (CAA) of 1966, a law enacted in times of Cold War animosity, allowing most of the undocumented Cubans to become legal permanent residents (LPRS) in the United States. Although the 'wet foot, dry foot' policy slightly narrowed the open-door character of the CAA after the 1994-95 Cuban migration wave, the U.S. immigration policy remained benevolent to Cubans for another two decades, as opposed to other foreign-born immigrants. Such treatment of Cuban arrivals was related to specific goals of U.S. foreign policy and thus did not follow otherwise protectionist immigration laws.

As a consequence of this long-lasting approach, the estimate derived from the 2010 census crossed for the first time the imaginary line of one million foreign-born Hispanics of Cuban origin in the United States,[1] a population that corresponded to about 10 percent of Cubans living on the island at that time. Likewise, well over half a million of Cuba-born arrivals have become LPRS[2] since the turn of the century and over one and half million Cubans left the island between 1960 and 2016.[3]

Under the 'wet foot, dry foot' rule, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) granted parole to Cubans based solely on their nationality, which automatically gave them the opportunity to apply for permanent residence and welfare benefits. This is no longer the case after Obama's policy change. Nowadays, Cuban nationals who enter the Unites States without inspection or valid permit cannot benefit from the CAA and thus face similar barriers as any other foreign national arriving to the United States without prior authorization.

The CAA, as a key element of the Cuba-specific immigration policy, has roots in traditionally antagonistic U.S-Cuba relations and the anti-Communist positioning of the United States during the Cold War era. Originally, the CAA was enacted by the Johnson administration (1963-69) due to the influx of Cuban migrants to the United States, which followed after the 1959 triumph of Cuban revolution and after the unsuccessful attempts by the Eisenhower (1953-61) and Kennedy administrations (1961-63) to destabilize and overthrow the Castro regime. The anti-Communist policy underlying the preferential treatment of Cuban immigrants, who were accepted in the United States

as refugees fleeing Castro's Cuba, also inspired the language of the U.S. immigration law, i.e. the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), which was created in 1952 and amended many times over the years. Importantly, this public law classifies, among other things, aliens ineligible for admission. For instance, the ACT 212 of the INA takes into account whether the immigrant 'has been a member of or affiliated with the Communist or any other totalitarian party'.[4] The presence of this wording in immigration legislation shows that the anti-Communist mind-set has not only shaped U.S. foreign policy after 1959 but also related immigration policy that eventually came to represent another source of pressure on the Cuban government.

In the Cold War context, U.S. foreign policy toward Cuba is often analysed in terms of U.S. interventionism in Cuba, the economic blockade of the Castro regime and diplomacy. Cuban migration flows and the Cuba-specific U.S. immigration legislation are often discussed within migration studies, that is, as a separate area of interest. However, U.S. immigration and refugee policy that allowed and even motivated many Cubans to leave Cuba is not commonly approached as an intrinsic part of U.S. foreign policy toward Cuba. This article thus seeks to interpret the long-lasting open-door policy of the United States favouring Cuban migrants and refugees as an inherent component of the U.S.-Cuba policy, drawing the parallel between nearly six decades of U.S.-Cuba hostility and Cuban migration flows to the United States that were discouraged only recently. Understanding changes in the U.S. approach toward Cuban arrivals is important especially in light of Obama's efforts to normalize U.S.-Cuban relations that raised hopes for ending the Cold War strategizing of both neighbours that have lasted into the twenty-first century.

Cold War Roots of the U.S. Open-Door Policy

The unpredictable triumph of the Cuban revolution leading to the emergence of a Soviet client state in the 'backyard' of the world's champion of capitalism defined U.S.-Cuban relations during and even after the Cold War. While most of the states started adjusting themselves to the new world order of the 1990s, the U.S. policy toward Cuba was unable to abandon the bipolar mind-set of previous decades. In spite of the fall of the Soviet Union and with Castro still in power, the Bush

administration (1989-93) as well as the Clinton administration (1993-2001) did not downgrade but rather strengthened U.S. policies seeking to instigate a regime change on the island.

About two years after Fidel Castro came to power and Fulgencio Batista fled the island, the new Cuban government proclaimed itself socialist. In the meantime, the outcome of Cuba's nationalist and anti-imperialist revolution—which was only later branded by Castro as a socialist revolution aligned with Marxist-Leninist ideology[5]—started having an impact in the Latin American region. As a consequence, political developments in Latin American states have become increasingly important for both the United States and the Soviet Union that competed for spheres of influence. As an important Third World protagonist of the anti-U.S. sentiment, Cuba inspired proponents of political change across Latin America, which represented a threat to U.S. dominance in the hemisphere. Emerging challenges to U.S. regional hegemony caused by polarization in numerous countries then motivated U.S. counterrevolutionary policies directed at Cuba and the rest of Latin America and Caribbean.

The economic embargo, a U.S.-Cuba policy that would stubbornly outlast the bipolar politics of the Cold War, was originally initiated by the suspension of Cuba's sugar import quota in the U.S. market in July 1960. For the United States, this was 'a tactic that had worked marvellously to bring the island into line in 1933',[6] relying on the fact that Cuban economy was highly dependent on trade with its closest neighbour. Yet this economic pressure, which indeed had a significant negative impact on Cuba's economy in the upcoming months and decades, failed to reach its objective this time. It rather became part of the mosaic of push-pull factors driving Cuban emigration.

The Eisenhower administration did not only fail to undermine Castro's power, but even had to face expropriation of all U.S.-owned properties. It did not take long for the Cuban people and U.S. policy makers to realize that Castro would bring substantive changes under his emerging authoritarian regime. As pointed out by Portes or Pedraza-Bailey, a changing domestic environment—especially the October 1960 nationalization of industries and reforms fulfilling aims of redistributive policies—represented an important push factor for Cuba's emigrating upper and middle class executives, manufacturers and other professionals.[7] Nonetheless, the framework of push factors motivating Cuban emigration remains incomplete if it relies on this

relatively narrowed focus of sociologists and migration scholars who study predominantly socio-economic aspects. With the exception of work by Cuba-born U.S. scholar Masud-Piloto, not much attention has been paid in a structured way to the goals of hostile U.S. foreign policy, whose impact on Cuban emigration has been essential.

U.S.-Cuban Relations

In 1961 and 1962, the Kennedy administration challenged Castro's Cuba in the military, economic and diplomatic fields, which eventually proved to be counterproductive as it contributed to solidification of Cuba's new anti-imperialist government, enhancing the on-island polarization that came to be one of the push factors of the early-1960s exodus. Besides affirming the economic blockade, President Kennedy also decided to follow his predecessor's plans to sponsor a counter-revolutionary force, whose U.S.-backed Bay of Pigs invasion in April 1961 failed. The so-called 'freedom fighters' that aimed to overthrow Castro were not only defeated because the Kennedy administration in the end resisted an open U.S. military involvement through the air,[8] but also because 'the revolution retained wide support and could easily crush a much stronger force than had invaded'.[9] This tough defeat made U.S.-Cuba policy switch to the diplomatic arena, forcing the expulsion of Cuba from the OAS in January 1962. Since the United States remained uncomfortable with even stronger Cuban revolution in the 'backyard', the leadership of the counterrevolutionary movement was increasingly entrusted to the CIA, and joint efforts with the mafia to eliminate Castro continued under the 1961-62 Operation Mongoose.[10] This sequence of threats and attempts to destabilize Cuba led Castro to align Cuban revolution with the political ideology of the Soviet bloc, which was a base for future economic as well as military cooperation. This antagonised already tense U.S.-Soviet and U.S.-Cuban relations, escalating to the Cuban missile crisis in October 1962.

Hostile U.S. foreign policy and its failure to overthrow Castro's regime, as well as Cuba's domestic reforms, contributed to advance the first exodus from revolutionary Cuba. According to Cuban official statistics, almost 200,000 people left the island between 1960 and 1962.[11] Interestingly, Pedraza-Bailey explained that the first group of Cuban emigrants that fled even prior to the early-1960s exodus was composed of predominantly political supporters of the previous Batista regime.[12] The 1980 report for U.S. Congress gives further details on the migration of 'close associates of Batista' who left already in 1958 as they were 'the first to leave', adding that these migrants 'were not regarded as

refugees by INS [the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service], and hence are not included in the annual refugee entry figures'.[13] Thus, departure of this group is not reflected in Cuba's 1959 data on migration from and to Cuba, which even shows that more people immigrated to the island than emigrated—with a positive total value of more than 12,000 arrivals—during the first year of Castro in power. The apparent influx in 1959, however, lacks analysis in existing sources on Cuban migration that largely focus on the early 1960s exodus. According to Berrio Sardá, most of the 1959 migrants that arrived to Cuba were Cubans possibly hopeful of Castro's new leadership that had been exiled in Spain, Latin America and the United States during Batista's regime.[14]

The unequal treatment of 1958 and post-1959 arrivals signals the first steps towards politicization of the U.S. approach to Cuban immigrants. While Batista's associates might have had more serious reasons to fear Castro, they were not treated in a preferential way as they left before Castro seized power and, maybe more importantly, before the nationalization of U.S. companies and Cuban economic reforms took place. The new approach to Cubans fleeing from the island thus seems to be in line with the Cold War position of the United States, which 'lost no opportunity to evidence its dismay at the losses suffered by U.S. interests'.[15] The relation between U.S. foreign policy goals and the special treatment of Cuban immigrants was pointed out for instance by Masud-Piloto, according to whom 'President Eisenhower initiated an unwritten open-door policy for Cuban refugees to weaken and discredit Castro and the revolution',[16] or by Nackerud and co-authors in 1999, who similarly perceived Eisenhower's 'automatic acceptance' of early 1960s arrivals 'as an element of foreign policy that relied on hard-line resistance to the Cuban regime', explaining that 'the open door policy set a precedent which would sustain the Cuban contradiction as a viable foreign policy based on national interests for the next 35 years'.[17] Nowadays, we know that U.S.-Cuba policy remained in the Cold War realm for much longer: fifty-four years passed between Eisenhower's offensive steps and Obama's push for normalization of U.S.-Cuban relations.

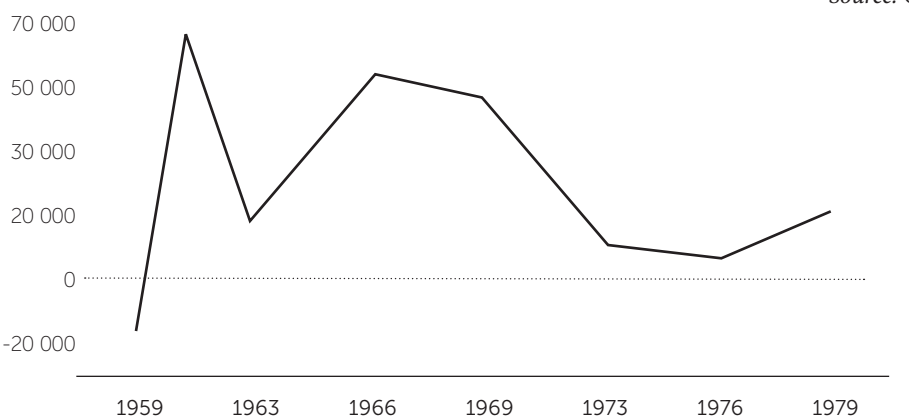
In 1960, more than 62,000 Cubans that were often politically and economically tied to U.S. capital left, hoping for U.S. intervention, Castro's fall and their early return. In 1961 and 1962, over 67,000 and 66,000 Cubans respectively,[18] emigrated as the Cuban economy encountered repeated setbacks and amidst insecure environment de-

fined by the Bay of Pigs invasion, OAS expulsion, CIA operations and the missile crisis. According to U.S. statistics on Cuban arrivals to the United States, most of the early 1960s émigrés—i.e. 153,000 of 200,000 Cubans—arrived during the twelve months of tensions culminating in the Cuban missile crisis.[19] While regime changes and especially revolutions often push people who disagree, fear political persecution or lose power out of their countries, both Castro's reforms and intense involvement of the United States in Cuban affairs represent the two sides of the coin and as such are equally relevant for the structural perspective of the push-pull migration framework, in the case of revolutionary Cuba. If it had not been for U.S. interventionism, the new Castro's regime would not have experienced the same way of consolidation of power, which occurred thanks to the U.S.-enhanced polarization of Cuban population and subsequent success of Castro's anti-imperialist *rally around the flag* strategy.

After regular flights between Havana and Miami were stopped during the missile crisis in October 1962 and before the Camarioca airlift was initiated in December 1965—allowing for eight years of 'freedom flights' from Varadero to Miami that transported relatives of Cuban émigrés settled in the United States—, Cuba's external migration rate, counted from the difference between the number of immigrants and emigrants with respect to average population, was rather low. Thus, no more than 43,000 Cubans left the island between 1963 and 1965.[20] In the same period, no major confrontations took place between Cuba and the United States and on the international scene the two Cold War superpowers experienced changes in leadership, leaving U.S. politics in the hands of President Johnson to be balanced by the Soviet bloc under Brezhnev's lead.

Table 1. Emigration from Cuba (number of migrants)

Source: ONE



The Camarioca air bridge agreement between the U.S. and Cuban governments gave way to Cuban lengthy yet mass emigration under the Memorandum of Understanding and brought more than 264,000 Cubans to the United States between 1965 and 1973.[21] This wave was characterized mainly by departure of the lower-middle class, predominantly motivated by family reunion and economic reasons, which resulted in a technical and administrative drain for revolutionary Cuba.

In 1966, the open-door approach to Cuban influx was formalized by the Cuban Adjustment Act, which regularized the status of Cuban immigrants and refugees that were living in the United States with no status since early 1960s and with no plans to return to the island. The original wording of this public law assured that 'the status of any alien who is a native or citizen of Cuba and who has been inspected and admitted or paroled into the United States subsequent to January 1959 and has been physically present in the United States for at least two years, may be adjusted (…) to that of an alien lawfully admitted for permanent residence (…)'.[22] Thus, the CAA was to apply retrospectively to cover all Cuban entries since Castro's revolutionary triumph and is still in place today, even though in practice Cuban immigrants cannot benefit from its provisions since the January 2017 termination of the 'wet-foot, dry-foot' policy.

Throughout past decades, the CAA has been criticised for its political nature and linkages to the historically antagonistic U.S.-Cuba policy. A common critique is that the CAA is 'obsolete and locked into the mind-set of the Cold War era, as well as unnecessary since Cubans may seek asylum under the refugee laws enacted since 1966'.[23] Nevertheless, most Cubans that emigrated from Cuba during and after the Camarioca airlift would not possibly qualify for traditional refugee status since their motivations were often economic. Indeed, the embargo affecting Cuban economy augmented shortages on the island and 'pushed' many Cubans—who increasingly resembled lower classes immigrants from other countries, habitually 'pulled' to the United States by attractive economic opportunities—to emigrate, turning Cuban political exile into economic exile.[24] The critique of the CAA opposed this preferential treatment given to Cubans whose motivations for emigration were each time less political, as other foreign-born nationals could not enjoy this open-door policy, needing to give proper explanation based on political arguments in order to justify their request for asylum and to eventually benefit from U.S. refugee laws.

Shift from Political to Economic Exile

U.S.-Cuban Relations

Cuba's insignificant external migration rate of the second half of 1970s—that is, in times when the U.S. economy suffered recession accompanied by high unemployment and when Cuba's real GDP was growing—increased sharply again in 1980 when Cuba experienced, or rather allowed for, another wave of emigration. Between April and September 1980, 125,000 Cubans departed to the United States from the Mariel port, leaving an unexpected challenge to the Carter administration (1977-81).[25] According to Cuban official statistics, in the whole year of 1980, the number of Cubans who emigrated equalled 141,742, which accounts for more departures in only five months that in the previous nine years. This might be to a certain extent linked to economic developments in both countries as after the 1973-75 economic downturn in the United States, Cuba's GDP growth dropped briefly yet significantly into negative values in 1980.

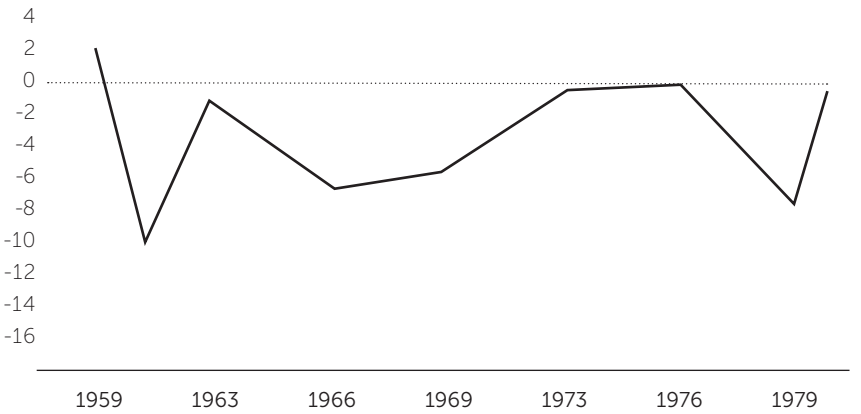


Table 2. External migration rate (per 1000 hab.)

Source: ONE

It is important to note that at that time U.S. policies were led by President Carter who decided not to follow in the footsteps of some of his predecessors that were actively seeking regime change in Cuba and other Latin American countries within the Cold War competition for spheres of influence. Carter's vision of foreign policy rather favoured human rights protection and even sought to halt the tradition of U.S. interventionism in Latin America. It was also during the Carter administration when tensions between the two neighbours eased, bringing about the opening of the U.S. Interests Section in Havana and a Cuban

diplomatic office in Washington, D.C. In this context, it is clear that 1980 Mariel exodus was not actively 'pulled' by U.S. policies seeking to debilitate Castro's regime. Yet favourable laws giving advantage to Cuban migrants were still in place benefiting most Mariel arrivals, and Cuba's economic difficulties possibly further motivated Cubans thinking about leaving the island.

The Mariel boatlift was possible thanks to Castro's decision to let go those who wanted to leave—and also many others whom the Cuban authorities deemed as convenient to leave. Thus, family members of Cubans living in the United States, economic migrants, dissidents, but also common as well as political prisoners or individuals that were treated in Cuba's mental health institutions left the island in masses. Prior to the Mariel crisis, U.S. open policy to Cuban migrants was widely supported. However, following this significant influx of so-called *Marielitos,* whose arrival to the United States led to noteworthy economic and social challenges (including increased crime rate), the indiscriminate acceptance of Cuban immigrants started changing. In December 1984, the Reagan administration (1981-89) even managed to reach an agreement with the Cuban government, seeking repatriation of 2,746 criminals and mental patients back to Cuba.[26] In return, the United States agreed to resume issuance of preference visas for up to 20,000 regular Cuban immigrants per year and admit 3,000 Cuban political prisoners and their families. Already at that time, any dialogue or agreement between the United States and Cuba earned the U.S. administration negative points from those Cuban Americans opposing any political move that would lead to improved relations between the two countries and recognition of Castro's regime. Luckily for the traditional opposition, Castro suspended the agreement in 1985 after Miami-based Radio Martí—labelled by Cuban official media in 2015 as an "unsuccessful subversive project" launched by Regan's "aggressive administration"[27]—began broadcasting to Cuba,[28] which demonstrated that the Cold War ideological struggle defining foreign as well as migration policies was still far from over. Indeed, it was the Reagan administration that added Cuba to the lists of state sponsors of terrorism for its support of revolutionary movements abroad.

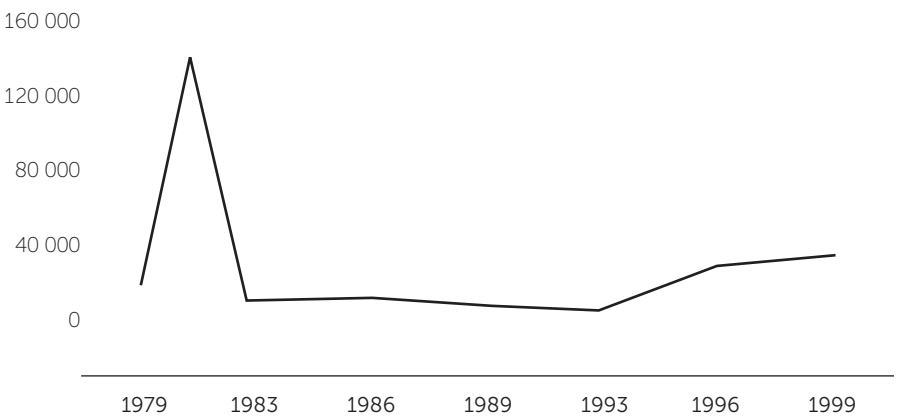
Following the Mariel exodus, Cuba's external migration rate remained low until the economic crisis of the 1990's, declared as 'special period in time of peace' which followed after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. These developments left Cuba without its main trad-

ing partner and the United States with a tempting opportunity to strengthen the existing embargo under the enduring Cold War antagonistic rationale, indicating that Washington remained 'more frozen in time than Havana',[29] which might be the case even nowadays. As a consequence of the Soviet Union collapse, the cooling of relations with Eastern and Central Europe, a stricter economic isolation advanced by the Cuban Democracy Act enacted by the U.S. Congress in 1992 with the aim to weaken or rather overturn the authoritarian character of Castro's government, and the failures of Cuban economic system characterized by energetic deficit or declining agricultural production, Cubans increasingly struggled to cope with their day-to-day economic battles. Between 1989 and 1993, Cuba's GDP fell by 35 percent, imports declined by 75 percent, the budget deficit rose to 33 percent of GDP and 85 percent of export and import markets were lost.[30]

It was also during the 1990s crisis when higher education enrolments begun to decline, hospital infrastructure suffered and inequalities started rising, letting the income share of the poorest 40 percent drop from 23.3 percent to 13.9 percent between 1989 and 1996.[31] Although Castro tried to prepare the Cuban population for a difficult period well ahead of time, stressing the need to fight for socialism, while arguing against multiparty systems and the market economy, famously proclaiming "Socialism or Death, Marxism-Leninism or Death",[32] the socioeconomic difficulties faced by Cubans—further enhanced by the long-lasting and strengthened embargo sustained by unchanged foreign policy goals of the United States—led to the Balsero crisis that started in 1994 and finally brought about the first revision of the U.S. open-door policy.

Table 3. Emigration from Cuba (number of migrants)

Source: ONE



While the new wave of exodus did not reach the early-1960s or the 1980 levels, the departure of 81,492 Cubans during the 1994-95 Balsero crisis was significant after more than a decade of constantly low emigration.[33] Initially, Castro perceived the new wave of incidents, such as hijacking of vessels or storming of foreign embassies by desperate Cubans, which took place between May and August 1994 and preceded the Balsero exodus, as a result of rumours of another U.S. sponsored boatlift to Miami, accusing the United States of encouraging illegal migration from Cuba.[34] However, the Clinton administration seemingly was not interested in 'pulling in' Cubans; his aim rather was to prevent another exodus.

The change of receptive approach toward Cuban arrivals and Clinton's authorization of the interception, detainment and transportation of Cubans fleeing by rafts and boats from the island resulted in growing numbers of Cuban emigrants detained at the U.S. Naval Base in Guantanamo Bay. After a brief involvement of Panama, which agreed to place over 8,600 Cubans in its temporary camps,[35] the U.S. administration signed an agreement with the Cuban government in September 1994, which was expected to normalize migration between the two nations as 'the status quo of U.S. policy toward Cuban migrants was altered significantly'.[36] Before it became apparent that the new agreement would not put an end to Cuban migration flows to the United States, some anticipated a more consistent U.S. refugee policy and the speedy end of preferential treatment of Cuban immigrants.[37] In wake of the 1994 events, the United States decided to start using parole to allow Cubans to immigrate and become LPRs under the CAA. In May 1995, another agreement sought to resolve the situation of 33,000 Cubans detained in Guantanamo Bay, and allowed most of these Cubans to come to the United States through the humanitarian parole provisions of the INA.[38] While paroling of Cubans to the United States become a common practice after the 1994-95 exodus, it was possible only for those Cubans reaching U.S. soil, as those intercepted on the sea would be deported. This change in the U.S. approach put certain restrictions on Cuban entries to the United States, but did not discourage Cuban migrants as the road to benefits under the CAA remained open for those who managed to reach U.S. shores or cross to the United States by land, which became increasingly popular and was halted only by the Obama administration in January 2017.

Belated Cold War Termination?

U.S.-Cuban Relations

Obama's Cuba policy received a good deal of both praise and criticism. Since the normalization of U.S.-Cuban relations announced in December 2014 and the establishment of the U.S. embassy in Havana in July 2015, Cuba has come increasingly into the attention of the international community as well as the general public. The U.S. policy toward Cuba started significantly changing direction after more than five decades, which was widely welcomed by the Cuban population as well as international actors, while commonly criticized by a generation of traditional Cuban opposition on the island and in exile.

With the warming of U.S.-Cuba relations, the fears of potential U.S. immigration policy change, possibly affecting preferential treatment of Cubans, spread among prospective Cuban emigrants, leading to a steep rise in Cuban migration to the United States. In the first two months of 2016, U.S. Customs and Border Protection reported 25,806 entries via ports of entry, which is more arrivals than in the whole

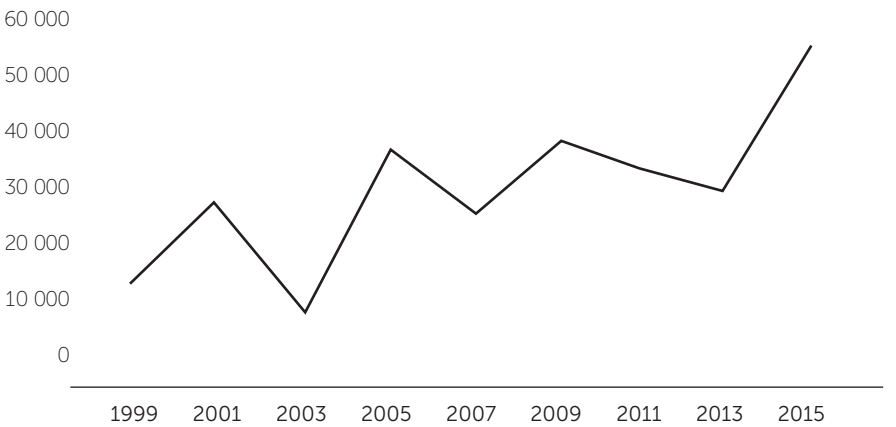


Table 4. Cubans becoming LPRs in the United States

Source: DHS

year of 2014 during which 24,277 Cubans entered the United States.[39] Throughout the 2016 fiscal year, i.e. between October 2015 and September 2016, the number of Cuban entries rose to 56,406, signalling a 31 percent increase compared to previous fiscal year, during which 43,159 Cubans entered in the same way.[40] Typically, Cubans entering

the United States became LPRs about a year later. After Obama's January 2017 announcement, which terminated the 'wet foot, dry foot' policy, Cuban migration flow to the United States significantly diminished. Many prospective emigrants were possibly discouraged from risking an often dangerous journey to reach U.S. soil without having an assured access to residency and work permit. Accordingly, 49 Cubans were intercepted by the U.S. Coast Guard off the coast of Florida between February and March 2017, compared with 407 in the same period in 2016, and 86 Cubans arrived at ports of entry at the U.S. southern border between February and March 2017 to make credible claims of fear of return to the island, which is significantly less than in the same months of 2016, when 11,895 Cubans sought entry under the 'wet foot, dry foot' policy.[41] Another factor that could have to a limited extent influence Cuban arrivals is the changing political environment in the United States. Particularly, Trump's anti-immigration stance and declining support of some Cuban-American Republicans for the CAA constructed a less favourable ambience for Cuban arrivals even prior to Obama's 2017 announcement. The Miami-Dade County Commission in Florida voted unanimously to ask Congress to revise the CAA in January 2015, when Republican U.S. Representative Carlos Curbelo complained that this 'generous law' was systematically abused,[42] and U.S. Senator Marco Rubio—one of the most vocal critics of the Castro regime—introduced legislation to the Senate in January 2016 seeking to 'roll back some benefits to Cubans unless they are legitimate political refugees'.[43] While the normalization of the U.S.-Cuba relations and the increasing reluctance to keep the CAA privileges alive initially sped Cuban influx to the United States, Obama's termination of the 'wet foot, dry foot' policy, accompanied by change in the historically benevolent attitude to all Cuban arrivals, clearly represents the decisive factor dissuading Cuban emigration. Nevertheless, it is questionable whether this change in the U.S. approach to Cuban migrants could signal fading away of the Cold War tendencies of U.S.-Cuba policy, as hostility between the two neighbours significantly increased after the Trump administration halted rapprochement promoted by the Obama administration.

While the United States started separating its immigration from foreign policy, Cuban leaders came to understand that more open borders, which would give Cubans greater opportunities to travel and even emigrate, increase the possibility of the actual regime perpetuating. Thus,

the Cuban government decided to ease travel restrictions for the first time after almost five decades by the 2013 migration reform, according to which Cubans were no longer required to obtain an exit permit to travel abroad or leave. This decision did not have a major impact on Cuban exodus by itself, but it could have facilitated emigration stimulated by the anticipation of the U.S. open-door policy termination.

Future migration flows of Cubans might be influenced by new immigration measures, announced in October 2017 by Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez. According to Rodríguez, Cubans living abroad will be able to travel to Cuba more freely as of January 1, 2018; they will no longer need a qualification stamp permitting travel to the island, children born abroad to Cuban parents will be able to apply for Cuban citizenship, Cubans who emigrated illegally will be also allowed to visit Cuba and Cuban Americans will newly have the opportunity to travel to Cuba recreationally by boat.[44] This will possibly lead to greater exchange between the two nations. Yet it is unclear whether there will be any impact on Cuban migration flows. More Cubans might find an easier way to leave the island either illegally by sea, or legally, for instance, through marriage and subsequent family reunion. On the other hand, the Cuban economy and population might benefit from a higher amount of goods and remittances reaching the island, which would weaken traditional economic push factors. Importantly, pull factors bringing Cubans to the United States are no more the same, as preferential access of Cuban migrants to U.S. residency and the labour market ended in January 2017. In some cases, these measures might even motivate some Cubans currently residing abroad to develop businesses in Cuba. Such an influx would bring substantial benefits to Cuba, whose aging population and long-term exodus of young and middle-aged Cubans is at the core of the island's demographic crisis. However, none of this will happen if the Trump administration continues to play the Cold War chess tournament, strategizing to achieve the fall of Cuba's political and economic system, which apparently still corresponds to its foreign policy goals.

In the period of Raúl Castro's expected departure from the presidency in February 2018 and related uncertainties, these immigration measures could rather strengthen the position and even nurture the popularity of Cuban policy makers. While the Trump administration rather seeks to reverse Obama's non-confrontational U.S.-Cuba policy, the Cuban government aims to safeguard further a U.S.-Cuba opening,

having in mind that improved U.S.-Cuban economic relations would aid Cuba's weak economy. At the same time, contemporary Cuban rhetoric intentionally puts Trump's increasingly antagonistic attitude toward Cuba in contrast with Cuba's 'open' approach to the United States. This is in line with Cuba's foreign policy strategy that typically focuses on highlighting flaws of U.S. politics on one hand, and winning hearts and minds in the international political arena on the other one, which is timely especially when U.S.-Cuban relations are experiencing a political and diplomatic crisis caused by mysterious sonic attacks that led the United States to withdraw its embassy staff from Havana and expel two Cuban diplomats from Washington.[45] As Chaguaceda put it, 'the Cuban political elite wants to portray itself to the world as the open antithesis of a belligerent Donald Trump, in the wake of the crisis generated by the alleged acoustic attacks on diplomats on the island. Above all, Raúl Castro and his heirs need minor allies to sustain their nascent authoritarian capitalism and compensate for the national economic and demographic crisis'.[46] In November 2017, Cuba's future migration flows are rather unpredictable as well as the general political situation on the island challenged by economic recession stemming from the ticking crisis in Venezuela. At the same time, the exact direction of U.S.-Cuba policy is uncertain as the Trump administration itself and as the U.S.-Cuban relations began rapidly cooling down after about a two-year-long attempt for normalization.

Conclusion

The nearly automatic acceptance of Cuban migrants in the United States has evolved significantly since the 1960s exodus, yet was not halted until U.S. immigration policy was set in line with attempts for normalization of U.S.-Cuban relations. While in the 1960s and 1970s the open-door policy toward Cuban refugees and migrants was a product of rapid Cold War polarization and thus was in line with increasingly hostile U.S. foreign policy toward Cuba, the U.S. administration became less welcoming to Cuban migrants after the 1980 Mariel crisis, which brought a different migration population to the United States than previous waves. In spite of this, the dissolution of the Soviet Union and change of power dynamics on the international scene did not result in significant immigration policy change nor warming up of

relations between the two countries and rather inspired the United States to further deepen Cuba's economic isolation. Nevertheless, this foreign economic policy has been rather short sighted, as it enhanced the 1990s exodus, allowed for the 2010s migration flows and even contributed to the solidification of Castro's regime that learned to use the embargo as the scapegoat for all Cuba's macroeconomic problems. The U.S.-Cuba policy—composed of foreign, economic and migration policies that share identical goals based on a historical anti-Communist stance—thus became increasingly inflexible and mired in the past.

U.S.-Cuban Relations

It was in the mid-1990s when a rapprochement between the two Cold War foes was anticipated following the narrowing of preferential treatment of Cuban migrants in the wake of the Balsero crisis. It was in December 2014 when the U.S. and Cuban public welcomed Obama's announcement of expected improvement in U.S.-Cuban relations and in January 2017 when the 'wet foot, dry foot' policy was to consistently follow normalization of relations. However, at the end of 2017, it is unclear whether the Trump administration will entirely retrocede steps taken by previous administration within the normalization process in line with already developed antagonistic rhetoric. In terms of U.S. immigration and refugee policy, it is not expected that the U.S. laws would allow for preferential treatment of Cuban arrivals in the same way as it had been done in the past. However, Cubans can still request asylum as other nationals that fear returning to the country of their origin. It remains a question whether Cubans will be treated differently in this asylum process. While it is certainly not easy anymore for Cuban migrants to install themselves in the United States, the elimination of the 'wet foot, dry foot policy' does not necessarily mean that the bipolar character of U.S.-Cuban relations has faded away. Current tensions, sharp rhetoric of both governments, on-going U.S. control of the naval base in Guantanamo Bay and, importantly, the U.S. embargo (whose distinct aim to affect Cuba's political and economic system) rather prove that the Cold War between the two countries is not yet fully over.

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Notes

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