

Testimony for the Subcommittee Hearing: “The President’s New Cuba Policy and U.S. National Security.”

Presented before the United States Western Hemisphere Subcommittee of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs – Ed Royce, Committee Chairman, Jeff Duncan, Subcommittee Chairman

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What Would Cuba Do?

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, distinguished members of the committee, I am honored to have this opportunity to share my analysis on the U.S. national security implications of the Administration’s new Cuba policy, and I commend you on calling this hearing on what is often a misunderstood threat to our national interests.

Last year, when the New York Times editorial board and others intensified their campaign for a unilateral-unconditional change in U.S.-Cuba policy, I published an essay titled: **WWCD**, that is, **What Would Castro Do** if the United States were to unilaterally and unconditionally end economic sanctions?

I argued then that, not probing how Castro would respond was an irresponsible omission since the formulation of U.S. foreign policy is often compared to a chess game in which every prospective move is analyzed with an eye to what the adversary’s counter move would be. A foreign policy move always seeks reciprocity.

General Raul Castro has now provided a comprehensive answer to my “**What Would Castro Do**” question.

On the 28th of January 2015, speaking in Costa Rica addressing the III Summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), General Castro set his demands. Before the two nations can re-establish normal relations the United States must:

1. Unconditionally eliminate all economic sanctions.
2. Return to Cuba the Guantanamo U.S. naval base.
3. Stop all the transmissions of Radio-TV Marti.
4. Compensate Cuba for the supposed damages caused by the embargo- which Cuba estimates at 116 billion dollars and growing.
5. Eliminate Cuba from the U.S. “State Sponsors of Terrorism” list.

The General declared that “If these problems aren’t resolved, this diplomatic rapprochement wouldn’t make any sense.” And that “It would not be ethical or acceptable to ask Cuba for anything in return... Cuba will not negotiate on these internal matters which are absolutely sovereign.”

With the General’s impossible preconditions now known, advocates of unconditional concessions to the Castro regime will likely double down and begin spinning all sorts of dangerous arguments as to why we should stay the new course.

We will hear that: General Castro was just laying out a starting negotiating position or that, since we tried economic sanctions for so long, should we not give this new policy some time?

And more troubling, we may even begin to hear arguments that Cuba may indeed be entitled to compensation from U.S. taxpayers, or that the naval base in Guantanamo is an unnecessary and expensive relic of the Cold War.

Distinguished members, when you hear these arguments, just consider for a moment how Mr. Putin and the Russian navy would love to have a warm-water port in the Caribbean of the quality of our Guantanamo naval base.

Consider also that if we further remove travel restrictions, thousands of small private vessels from South Florida will begin visiting Cuba on a regular basis and may return with hidden cargo. We can all use our imagination as to the nature of the cargo whether drugs, contraband goods, or human trafficking. Our overstretched Coast Guard would not be able to effectively monitor thousands of private vessels traveling regularly between South Florida and Cuba.

Given the long standing and close links between Cuba and Iran, this ocean travel possibility exposes our border security to new and serious vulnerabilities to terrorism and contraband.

Moreover, the President's new measures will enrich primarily the Cuban military, and will not impede General Castro's close alliance with Iran, Russia or Venezuela. It is hard to discern how fortifying a totalitarian government promotes democracy.

The new Cuba policy has legitimized the Cuban military regime in the eyes of the world. By sanctioning an oppressive regime that violates human rights with abandon, the President has reversed our long standing support for democratic governance in Latin America.

Since the 1970's, U.S. policy toward Latin America has emphasized democracy, human rights, and constitutional government. Arguably, U.S. policy in defense of democratic governance has not been uniform throughout the world. But until recently, defending democratic values was our long established policy in Latin America. The gratuitous normalization of relations with an oppressive military dictatorship sends the wrong message to the continent.

Every Latin American would-be dictator now realizes that suppressing civil liberties in their countries is not an impediment to having a good diplomatic and commercial relationship with the United States.

Contrary to the argument of some that the new policy will help improve relations with Latin America, our implicit seal of approval of a military dictatorship further weakens American influence and prestige in the region. It encourages anti-American leaders everywhere to take positions inimical to U.S. interests as Cuba

has done for decades. One unfortunate visual the new policy has conveyed is that, taking American hostages can be very rewarding.

Finally, General Castro, in order to secure whatever advantages he may be pursuing, may promise some minor concessions. But before embracing his military dictatorship, we should understand the General has made it clear that Cuba will not change its ways.