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## Thaw in US-Cuba Relations?

By Stephen Lendman

December 18, 2014

*On December 17, the Havana Times headlined “Obama Announces New US Approach on Cuba,” saying:*

“In a surprise announcement today US President Obama has taken sweeping steps to re-launch US relations with Cuba.”

“Talks between Washington and Havana have actually been going on secretly in Canada for a year and a half with mediation assistance from Pope Francis.”

More on this below.

On December 17, Obama said in part:

“Today, the United States of America is changing its relationship with the people of Cuba.”

“In the most significant changes in our policy in more than fifty years, we will end an outdated approach that, for decades, has failed to advance our interests, and instead we will begin to normalize relations between our two countries.”

“Through these changes, we intend to create more opportunities for the American and Cuban people, and begin a new chapter among the nations of the Americas.”

“...I’ve instructed Secretary Kerry to immediately begin discussions with Cuba to reestablish diplomatic relations that have been severed since January of 1961.”

“Going forward, the United States will reestablish an embassy in Havana, and high-ranking officials will visit Cuba.”

“...I’ve instructed Secretary Kerry to review Cuba’s designation as a State Sponsor of Terrorism. This review will be guided by the facts and the law.”

“Terrorism has changed in the last several decades. At a time when we are focused on threats from al Qaeda to ISIL, a nation that meets our conditions and renounces the use of terrorism should not face this sanction.”

“...(W)e we are taking steps to increase travel, commerce, and the flow of information to and from Cuba.”

“...I’m under no illusion about the continued barriers to freedom that remain for ordinary Cubans.”

“(G)iven Cuba’s history, I expect it will continue to pursue foreign policies that will at times be sharply at odds with American interests.”

Why Cuba? Why now? Why not earlier? What will change? What won’t? James Petras saying Washington “is totally alone in its boycott of Cuba.”

Why when it uses sanctions as a key weapon of choice. Against independent states. Targeted for regime change. Wanting pro-US vassal regimes replacing them.

Why when US/Venezuelan relations remain hostile? When Congress just passed the Venezuela Defense of Human Rights and Civil Society Act of 2014.

Unanimously. By voice vote in both houses. Obama signing it into law. Imposing sanctions on targeted Venezuelan officials.

Irresponsibly. Hypocritically. The world’s leading human rights abuser targeting one of its staunchest defenders.

Why when Cold War 2.0 rages against Russia? More virulently than ever. Congress authorized more sanctions. US-instigated oil wars batter its economy and currency.

Hot war remains possible. Unthinkable between the world’s two most formidable nuclear powers.

Why when US/Iranian relations remain frosty? Punishing sanctions remain in place.

Tehran's peaceful nuclear program a pretext for Washington's real aim. Regime change. Ousting its independent government. Installing a pro-Western stooge one.

Why when Obama's Asia/Pacific pivot targets China? Wanting it marginalized. Weakened. Isolated. Contained. Controlled. Eliminating one of America's two main rivals.

Why when Obama's war on Syria shows no signs of ending? Or Iraq war 3.0. Or global US interventions. Covert mischief.

Making the world safe for monied interests. Maintaining Washington's permanent war policy. On humanity. At home and abroad.

With America increasingly militarized. Governed under a police state apparatus.

Federal, state and local authorities committing virtually every imaginable civil and human rights abuse. Unaccountably.

Why when US policy more than ever threatens world peace? Humanity's survival. When advancing its imperium matters most. No matter the consequences.

Obama's new Cuba policy comes after over half a century of blockade and isolation. Extreme hostility. Hundreds of failed attempts to assassinate Fidel Castro.

Biowarfare. Including dengue fever. Killing hundreds. Sickening thousands.

Contaminating crops and livestock. Terror-bombing hotels. Industrial facilities. Various other sabotage. Sinking fishing boats. Blowing up Cubana Flight 465. Killing 78 people on board.

US military doctrine embraces anything goes. Including "massive casualty producing events." Mindless of innocent civilian deaths and injuries.

State terrorism is official US policy. Cuba a prime target for decades. Since Eisenhower authorized CIA efforts to oust Castro. The failed April 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion followed.

So did support for anti-Castro terrorist groups. Ongoing for decades. Including Alpha 66. Omega 7. Brothers to the Rescue. The Cuban American National Foundation (CANF). Openly admitting acts of murder. Intentions to keep killing.

CANF headed by fascist extremist Jorge Mas Canosa. Until his 1997 death. Embraced by various US presidents at the White House.

Historian Jorge Dominguez reviewed thousands of declassified anti-Castro documents. Involving US-sponsored terrorism. Showing no concern whatever for human life or welfare. According to Dominguez:

“Only once (in all documents he reviewed) did a US official raise something that resembled a faint moral objection to US-government sponsored terrorism.”

In his book titled “Voices from the Other Side: An Oral History of Terrorism Against Cuba,” Keith Bolender said:

“American aggression ran from the embargo, propaganda, isolation, and the Bay of Pigs military invasion.”

“As the rhetoric increased, terrorist acts were formulated and carried out...American officials estimated millions would be spent to develop internal security systems, and State Department officials expected the Cuban government to increase internal surveillance in an attempt to prevent further acts of terrorism.”

“These systems, which restricted civil rights, became easy targets for critics.”

Obama’s Wednesday announcement followed 18 months of secret negotiations. Exploratory talks. Beginning in June 2013.

Brokered by Canadian and Vatican officials. In Ottawa. Toronto. Vatican City.

Pope Francis the first Latin American pontiff. Raising possible Cuban rapprochement. In March last year. When Obama visited the Vatican.

Followed by sending Obama and Castro letters. Urging an end to decades of hostile relations.

John Kerry engaged his Cuban counterpart. Foreign Secretary Bruno Rodriguez. Focusing on Alan Gross’ release.

A USAID subcontractor operative. Acting against Cuban independence and territorial integrity. Convicted of activities involving spying. Destabilization. Subversion.

At the time, Cuban Parliamentary President said, Gross “violated Cuban laws and national sovereignty and has committed crimes which in the United States can carry heavy sentences.”

In June 2013, Obama’s deputy national security advisor, Ben Rhodes, and Latin American advisor. Ricardo Zuniga, initiated the first of nine meetings.

With their Cuban counterparts. In Canada. Culminating with a 45-minute Obama/Raul Castro conversation.

The first presidential dialogue between both countries since 1959. Embargo following in 1961.

On Wednesday, Gross was released. Along with three remaining Cuban Five prisoners.

Unjustly convicted of Espionage. Conspiracy to commit murder. Acting as foreign government agents.

In October 2011, Rene Gonzalez was released. Following 13 years in prison. Fernando Gonzales released in February 2014.

Gerardo Hernandez. Antonio Guerrero. Ramon Labanino now freed. All five regarded as Cuban national heroes.

In America monitoring Miami-based, US funded, anti-Castro right-wing terrorist groups. Helping to prevent future attacks.

Convicted in kangaroo court proceedings. At least 14 journalists covertly got US funding to vilify them.

In August 2005, a three-judge Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals panel overturned their convictions.

Ordered a new trial. To no avail. In October 2005, the entire court halted the ruling.

Ordered an en banc (full court) hearing. In August 2006, overturning the 2005 decision (10 – 2). Affirming the district court ruling.

In December 2007, UK attorney Steve Cottingham called the Cuban Five's trial "profoundly flawed."

"(T)heir (prison) conditions...inhumane..." Calling them "fall guys in an attempt to cover up the US's support for illegal activity to overthrow the (legitimate) government of the Republic of Cuba."

A Miami trial venue assured conviction. Defense lawyers knew fair proceedings were impossible. Guilt by accusation followed.

On December 17, the UK-based Cuba Solidarity Campaign headlined "Volvieron (returned)!"

CSC director Rob Miller calling the release of the three remaining Cuban Five members "the right thing to do."

"It is truly wonderful news for the Five, their families, all those who have campaigned to see this day and above all for the Cuban people," he said.

"We now hope that this will see the end of 50 years of the failed policy of aggression and blockade and the beginning of a new era of friendly relations between two countries and two peoples."

On Wednesday, Obama promised “a new chapter” in US/Cuban relations. Reestablishing diplomatic ties. Severed since January 1961.

A promised review of Cuba’s designation as “a State Sponsor of Terrorism.” Guided by “facts and the law.”

Obama’s rhetoric remained hostile. Lying about “continued barriers to freedom that remain for ordinary Cubans.”

Expecting continued Havana policies at times “sharply at odds with American interests.”

Measures Obama announced include eventually easing travel and trade restrictions. Making it easier for Cubans to receive remittances from America.

Confirming Obama’s participation in the April 2015 Summit of the Americas. Cuba invited for the first time. Since meetings began in 1994.

Last June, Bolivia and Ecuador threatened to boycott the summit if Cuba wasn’t invited. Argentine Foreign Minister Hector Timerman called his participation “difficult” without Cuba.

Brazil. Chile. Paraguay. Mexico. Uruguay called for Cuba’s involvement. It remains to see how so-called new US/Cuban relations unfold.

Decades-old blockade conditions aren’t lifted. Repressive Helms-Burton legislation remains in place. Passed in March 1996.

Hardening embargo conditions. It takes a giant leap of faith to expect Congress to lift them any time soon. Especially with Republicans in charge. Obama a lame duck.

Presidential aspirant Jeb Bush calling his shift a “dramatic overreach” of executive authority. Saying his action “rewards those dictators.”

Cuban President Raul Castro spoke on national television. Simultaneously with Obama’s announcement.

Saying “(w)e have been able to make headway in the solution of some topics of mutual interest for both nations.”

“President Obama’s decision deserves the respect and acknowledgment of our people. This in no way means that the heart of the matter has been resolved.”

“The economic, commercial and financial blockade, which causes enormous human and economic damages to our country, must cease.”

“(T)he progress made in our exchanges proves that it is possible to find solutions to many problems.”

Largely rhetorical ones so far. Ending over half a century of US hostility won't come easily or quickly.

Not as long as Washington's criminal class remains bipartisan. Targeting all independent states for regime change. Longstanding policy not about to change.