

U.S.-Cuba Trade and Economic Council, Inc.

New York, New York

Telephone (917) 453-6726 • E-mail: council@cubatrade.org

Internet: <http://www.cubatrade.org> • Twitter: @CubaCouncil

Facebook: www.facebook.com/uscubatradeandeconomiccouncil

LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/company/u-s--cuba-trade-and-economic-council-inc-

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In a First, Parties in Helms-Burton Case Reach Settlement Over Property in Cuba

An American family that once owned a vast sugar plantation in Cuba sought more than \$160 million from Swiss multinational LafargeHolcim for its use of the property that had been seized in the Cuban revolution.

By Amy Guthrie



Revolution Square in Havana, Cuba with a famous Che Guevara image. Photo: Kamira/Shutterstock.com

The Switzerland-based building materials multinational LafargeHolcim has settled a lawsuit brought by Americans seeking compensation for the company's use of property seized long ago by the Cuban government, marking the first win on behalf of claimants brought under Title III of the Helms-Burton Act.

More than two dozen cases were filed after the Trump administration allowed Title III to take effect in May 2019, paving the way for U.S. citizens to pursue litigation against entities that purportedly traffic in Cuban property that was privately owned before the 1959 communist revolution.

A string of those cases were dismissed in 2020, either because plaintiffs had inherited their claims from deceased relatives after a cutoff date or because they were unable to establish jurisdiction.

The U.S. Justice Department's Foreign Claims Settlement Commission certified nearly 6,000 claims on property confiscated by Cuba with a principal value of \$1.9 billion.

The case against LafargeHolcim went to mediation April 22, with an agreement to settle reached in principle May 20. A definitive settlement is still pending, according to a filing in the Southern District of Florida.

Claimants sought the current fair market value of the confiscated property, which they estimated to be worth \$270 million. That amount stood to be trebled under the terms of Helms-Burton, for total damages of \$810 million, plus reasonable attorneys' fees and costs.

Alternatively, the parties could treble the amount certified in 1960, plus interest, to reach a payout of \$160 million, plus fees.

Miami-based attorney Nelson Bellido, who represented the claimants on behalf of Roig Lawyers, did not immediately respond to requests for comment. David Baron, a partner at Berliner, Corcoran & Rowe in Washington, D.C., who also represented the claimants, declined to comment.

Grace Mead, a Miami-based shareholder with Stearns Weaver Miller Weissler Alhadeff & Sitterson who represented LafargeHolcim, also declined to comment.

Hope for Helms-Burton Claims?

Attorneys in South Florida and Washington, D.C., have been eagerly awaiting signals from the Biden administration on its approach to Cuba, with some advocating for Title III to be suspended. So far, changes to U.S. policy with the island appear to be a low priority.

John Kavulich, president of the nonprofit U.S.-Cuba Trade and Economic Council, said the clinching of a first settlement involving certified Cuba claimants makes it “unlikely” that the Biden administration will suspend Title III.

The case against LafargeHolcim was strengthened by evidence that an outside counsel had warned against potential Helms-Burton violations when the company set out more than two decades ago to invest in Cuba. The company had originally planned to manage its Cuba venture through a wholly owned subsidiary that was doing business in Florida. After the warning from counsel, it changed course.

“Defendants used a complex web of shell entities and transactions designed, until very recently, to conceal the fact that LafargeHolcim has partially owned and operated and profited from the Carlos Marx cement plant in partnership with the Cuban government since 2000,” the complaint argued.

The company’s Florida subsidiary became inactive shortly after the investment in Cuba. The claimants described the confiscated property as “a prosperous closely held family-owned corporation” that consisted of sugar cane fields, a mill and extensive pasture land in the province of Las Villas, Cuba.

Their land-holdings included over 27,170 acres dotted with limestone and traversed by two rivers, one of which was navigable, furnishing water transportation to the deepwater port of Cienfuegos. They also owned 31 miles of narrow-gauge railroad with steam locomotives. They argued that the Carlos Marx cement plant utilizes and benefits from the confiscated property, including its rivers, rail lines, limestone and other infrastructure.

The Kansas City Star

Kansas City, Missouri

21 May 2021

Republican Sen. Jerry Moran hopes to lift embargo on Cuba to boost Kansas farmers

By Bryan Lowry
WASHINGTON

Kansas Sen. Jerry Moran wants to lift the nation’s long-standing trade embargo on Cuba, a move that would open a potentially lucrative market for Kansas farmers and ranchers.

Moran, a Republican, has long favored relaxing restrictions on trade with the communist Caribbean country. But his advocacy gained little traction when former President Donald Trump’s administration took a hawkish stance on Cuba.

But with President Joe Biden in office and Democrats in control of both chambers of Congress, Moran is partnering with two Democrats, Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar and Vermont Sen. Patrick Leahy, to revive the issue.

In announcing their legislation to lift the embargo, Moran argued the policy punishes U.S. businesses and empowers China.

“The unilateral trade embargo on Cuba blocks our own farmers, ranchers and manufacturers from selling into a market only 90 miles from our shoreline, while foreign competitors such as China benefit at our expense,” Moran said in a statement.

“This legislation will expand market opportunities for U.S. producers by allowing them to compete on a level playing field with other countries.”

The measure would repeal all current restrictions against conducting business with Cuba, including 1961 law which first authorized an embargo.

“Instead of looking to the future, U.S.-Cuba policy has been defined for far too long by conflicts of the past,” Klobuchar said.

“As we work to rebuild our economy following the pandemic, lifting the trade embargo will open the door to a large export market and create jobs in the U.S. It’s time to turn the page on the failed policy of isolation by passing our bipartisan legislation to end the embargo once and for all.”

The U.S. began allowing the sale of food and agricultural products to Cuba in the early 2000s under reforms enacted late in Bill Clinton’s presidency. These exports brought in more than \$163 million last year, according to the U.S.-Cuba Trade and Economic Council.

But economic restrictions remain in place. The senators pointed to analysis from U.S. Trade Commission that lifting the embargo would increase exports by 166 % and bring in \$800 million to the U.S. economy over five years with much of that money coming from exports of Kansas staples, such as wheat and soybeans.

“We applaud Sen. Moran’s work in offering legislation to lift the Cuba trade embargo,” said Kansas Farm Bureau President Rich Felts. “Having the opportunity to export Kansas staples like wheat, corn and soybeans with our Cuban neighbors would be a win for Kansas communities, the state and the nation.”

However, Moran’s proposal is likely to face opposition from a significant portion of the Republican Party. Florida Republican Sen. Marco Rubio, the son of Cuban immigrants, warned in December against thawing relations with Cuba in a guest column in *The Miami Herald*.

“If Biden were to recommit to the same Obama-era policies, we know far too well who would suffer: those who seek a freer, more democratic Cuba, including the island’s dissidents, political prisoners, artists, and activists,” Rubio wrote.

Fellow Kansas Republican Mike Pompeo likely complicated Moran’s case when he added Cuba to the list of state sponsors of terrorism in January during his final nine days as secretary of state, reversing former President Barack Obama’s decision to remove the island nation from the list in 2015.

“With this action, we will once again hold Cuba’s government accountable and send a clear message: the Castro regime must end its support for international terrorism and subversion of U.S. justice,” Pompeo said at the time.

Thomson Reuters
London, United Kingdom
20 May 2021

Analysis: Soaring international prices aggravate Cuban food crisis

By Marc Frank



A woman walks past a cart selling biscuits in downtown Havana, Cuba, May 18, 2021. Picture taken on May 18, 2021.
REUTERS/Alexandre Meneghini

Soaring international food and shipping prices and low domestic production are further squeezing import-dependent Cuba's ability to feed its people.

Cuba traditionally imports by sea around 70% of the food it consumes, but tough U.S. sanctions and the pandemic, which has gutted tourism, have cut deeply into foreign exchange earnings.

For more than a year Cubans have endured long waiting lines and steep price rises in their search for everything from milk, butter, chicken and beans to rice, pasta and cooking oil. They have scavenged for scant produce at the market and collected dwindling World War II-style food rations.

This month the Communist-run government announced flour availability would be cut by 30% through July.

Diorgys Hernandez, general director of the food processing ministry, said when he announced the wheat shortage that "the financial costs involved in wheat shipments to the country" were partly to blame.

That was bad news for consumers who had been buying more bread to make up for having less rice, pasta and root vegetables at the dinner table.

"People eat a lot of bread and there is concern there is going to be a shortage of bread because that is what people eat the most," Havana pensioner and cancer survivor Clara Diaz Delgado said as she waited in a food line.

Cuba does not grow wheat due to its subtropical climate. The price of the commodity was \$280 per tonne in April, compared with \$220 a year earlier.

The government has also said the sugar harvest was short of the planned 1.2 million tonnes by more than 30%, coming in at less than a million tonnes for the first time in more than a century.

Cuba will have trouble making up for a shortage of domestically produced sugar as international prices are around 70% higher than a year ago.

COST OF SHIPPING

Adding to the pain, the cost of international container shipping is up as much as 50% over the last year and bulk freight more.

The U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization reported its international food price index was up 30.8% through April compared with the same month last year, and the highest since May 2014.

The Cuban state has a monopoly on foreign trade and purchases around 15% of the food it imports from the United States for cash under a 2000 exception to the trade embargo.

John Kavulich, president of the U.S.-Cuba Trade and Economic Council, which follows the trade, said sales fell 36.6% last year to \$163.4 million, compared with 2019. They recovered in the first quarter, reaching \$69.6 million, though that represented less food due to higher prices.

Chicken, Cuba's most important U.S. import, is badly affected. A U.S. businessman who sells chicken to Cuba said he shipped drumsticks at 24 cents a pound in January and 48 cents in April. He did not wish to be named.

“Resuming global demand, increased prices for product inputs and labor shortages suggest that commodity prices will not decrease soon,” Kavulich said.

The economy declined 11% last year and according to local economists contracted further during the first trimester of 2021 as a surge in the new coronavirus kept tourism shuttered and much of the country partially locked-down.

The government reported that foreign exchange earnings were just 55% of planned levels last year, while imports fell between 30% and 40%.

Incoming container traffic was down 20% through April, compared with last year, according to a source with access to the data, who requested anonymity.

The government has not published statistics for the notoriously inefficient and rustic agricultural sector since 2019 but scattered provincial and other reports on specific crops and livestock indicate substantial declines for rice, beans, pork, dairy and other Cuban fare.

This was confirmed by a local expert who requested anonymity and said output was down by double digits due to a lack of fuel and imported fertilizer and pesticides.

RTV Televizija Slovenija

Ljubljana, Slovenija

9 May 2021

Kubance bolj zanima, kje bodo kupili meso in zdravila kot pa, kdo bo na oblasti

Kuba bi lahko postala najmanjša država, ki bo razvila cepivo proti covidu-19

Anja P. Jerič
Havana - MMC RTV SLO

Po več kot 60 letih sta z glavnega političnega odra odšla brata Castro, a Kubanci so prepričani, da gre le za kozmetično spremembo na oblasti. Bolj jih skrbijo slabe gospodarske razmere. "Tako slabo še nismo živeli," pravijo.



Kuba je še vedno polna revolucionarnih fesel in podob Fidela Castra ter Ernesta "Cheja" Guevarre. Foto: EPA

89-letni Raul Castro je sredi aprila na kongresu komunistične stranke napovedal, da se umika iz politike in z mesta generalnega sekretarja Komunistične partije Kube. Pojasnil je, da bo vodenje stranke prepustil mladi generaciji, ki je "polna strasti in protiimperialističnega duha", in dodal, da se poslavlja zadovoljen, ker je opravil svojo dolžnost in da "verjame v prihodnost države". "Obenem moramo opustiti zastarelo iluzijo, da je Kuba edina država na svetu, v kateri lahko preživiš brez dela." Med vodenjem države je uvedel pomembne gospodarske reforme – dovolil je delovanje majhnim zasebnim podjetjem, zaživela je prodaja avtomobilov in hiš, v državo je prišla mobilna telefonija in razmahnilo se je medmrežje.

Opustiti moramo zastarelo iluzijo, da je Kuba edina država na svetu, v kateri lahko preživiš brez dela. Raul Castro

Raul Castro je na mestu predsednika države brata Fidela nasledil leta 2008, leta 2011 pa je sedel na še vplivnejši stolček generalnega sekretarja stranke. Zdaj se poslavlja s tega mesta, prav tako ne bo več vrhovni poveljnik oboroženih sil – oba položaja je opravljal dva petletna mandata. Na kongresu pred petimi leti je Raul Castro dejal, da bi morali skupaj z njim iz politbiroja odstopiti tudi vsi preostali revolucionarji njegove generacije, a ni jasno, ali se bo to res zgodilo.



Novi prvi mož države Manuel Diaz-Canel predstavlja kontinuiteto oblasti. Foto: Reuters

Komunistična stranka je na oblasti na Kubi neprekinjeno od leta 1959, a strokovnjaki ugotavljajo, da se v državi še nikoli ni nakopičilo toliko težav kot prav v zadnjem obdobju. Bojuje se s pandemijo covid-19, z ameriškimi gospodarskimi sankcijami, s kroničnim pomanjkanjem osnovnih življenjskih potrebščin, predvsem hrane in zdravil, zaradi katerih vsak dan nastajajo dolge vrste čakajočih, in zapletenimi uradniškimi postopki. Nič čudnega, da se zato vse bolj krepi politična opozicija.

"Strici iz ozadja" ostajajo

"Mislim, da razmere še nikoli niso bile tako slabe, kot so zdaj," je za Financial Times dejala upokojena profesorica Anaida Gonzalez. "Imamo ogromno živine, a na trgovskih policah ni mleka, masla, jogurta in mesa. Ljudje se vse dni ukvarjajo le s tem, kje dobiti hrano, in s pandemijo," je dodala. Zato je tudi novica o Castrovem slovesu morda bolj kot v domovini odmevala v tujini. Kot piše Guardian, so Kubanci pričakovali, da se bo Raul Castro pri 89 letih odločil za umik, dvomijo pa, da s koncem dinastije Castro prihaja tudi svež veter in globlje spremembe v njihovih življenjih. "Menim, da bo vse ostalo isto, vsaj dokler bodo stari veljaki še vedno delovali iz ozadja in vplivali na kubansko politiko," je dejal neki prebivalec Havane.



Brata Castro leta 1995. Kubo sta skupaj vodila kar 62 let. Foto: AP

Za zdaj kaže, da imajo prav. Najvplivnejši človek v državi, generalni sekretar komunistične partije, bo postal 60-letni Miguel Diaz-Canel, že dozdajšnji predsednik države, katerega glavno geslo na družbenih omrežjih in v javnih govorih pove veliko: "Somos continuidad" – Smo kontinuiteta. Gre za dolgoletnega varovanca in učenca Raula Castra. Tudi geslo kongresa je bil "Kontinuiteta in enotnost". Zato mnogi upajo v izbor drugega sekretarja stranke, saj bo od tega odvisno, ali se bodo temelji stranke zatresli. "Menim, da je samo eno takšno ime, ki bi lahko poslalo pozitiven signal in upanje na spremembo politike. To je Lazara Lopez-Acea, trenutno prva sekretarka strankinega krila v Havani. Gre za žensko afrokubanskih korenin. Ljudje jo zelo cenijo," je dejal profesor na Ameriški univerzi v Washingtonu William LeGrande.

A prvi se bo moral izkazati Diaz-Canel, znanilec dolgotrajnega prenosa oblasti z revolucionarnih veteranov na generacijo, rojeno po letu 1959. Kot predsednik ni naredil večjih napak, a šele zdaj bo moral pokazati pogum, spretnost in ustvarjalnost, da bo državo popeljal iz gospodarskega razsula in znal umiriti vse glasnejše politične oporečnike, ki "štrlijo" iz enostrankarskega sistema.



Prazne police ene izmed trgovin v Havani. Foto: Reuters

Vse več plačevanja z ameriškimi dolarji

Za Kubance ključna stvar dan za dnevom ostaja, kako priti do hrane. V letu 2020 je uvoz hrane, goriva in surovin upadel za 40 odstotkov, gospodarstvo se je skrčilo za 11 odstotkov. Država mora uvoziti 60 odstotkov vse hrane. Turizem, glavni vir dohodkov, se je zaradi pandemije močno skrčil, nakazila Kubancev iz ZDA v domovino pa so se zaradi zaostrenih pravil ZDA praktično ustavila.

V začetku leta je oblast skušala slabo gospodarsko stanje popraviti z nekaj reformami, med katerimi je bila najpomembnejša denarna. V skladu z njo so opustili uporabo t. i. konvertibilnega kubanskega pesa (CUC), tako da je v uporabi ostal le še nekonvertibilni peso (CUP). Peso so v primerjavi z ameriškimi dolarjem devalvirali za 96 odstotkov, s tem pa so mnogi državljani – pa tudi vlada – začeli kot denarno valuto na veliko uporabljati ameriški dolar. Kot piše portal Deutsche Welle, je tako mogoče z dolarji v določenih trgovinah kupiti gospodinjske aparate in avtomobile, prav tako pa tudi hrano in higienske pripomočke, če imajo bančni račun v tuji valuti in debetno kartico. Poteza je povzročila tudi rast inflacije, ki naj bi po napovedih ekonomistov še letos dosegla 500 odstotkov.

Danes stojimo v vrsti za piščanca, jutri bomo za olje. Čakanje v vrsti se nikoli ne konča. Prebivalec Havane

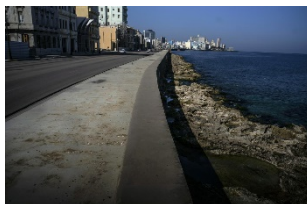
Prav zato mnoge trgovine, v katerih kot edina denarna enota ostaja nekonvertibilni peso, propadajo. Drugi razlog za njihovo životarjenje pa je vse manjša založenost z izdelki. Tako vrste pred trgovinami postajajo vse daljše in daljše in so postale že nekakšen zaščitni znak Kube v zadnjem času. "Danes stojimo v vrsti za piščanca, jutri bomo za olje. Čakanje v vrsti se nikoli ne konča," je dejal prebivalec Havane. Dolge kolone so najbolj kričeč dokaz vse hujših gospodarskih razmer v državi.



Čakanje pred trgovinami je za nekatere postalo kar zaposlitev. Foto: AP

Čakanje v vrsti – kubanski "nacionalni šport"

Čakanje na hrano pred trgovinami je v časih širjenja okužb z novim koronavirusom postalo nov mogoč vir okužb, za nekatere je to postalo kar – zaposlitev. Nastala je namreč nova skupina ljudi, imenovanih coleros, ki stojijo v vrsti namesto drugih in hrano nato prodajajo naprej. Druga možnost pa je, da si mesto pred trgovino rezervirajo že ob petih zjutraj, ko je zaradi pandemije dovoljeno zapustiti stanovanje, si svoje mesto označijo in ga nato ob devetih, ko trgovine odprejo vrata, prodajo pravemu kupcu, ki je tako prej na vrsti. Ob prihodu pred trgovino tako kupci nikoli ne vedo, koliko ljudi v resnici stoji pred njimi, saj imajo mnogi colerosi svoja mesta le označena. "Prav lahko se zgodi, da si vesel, ker je pred teboj le deseterica, nato pa kmalu ugotoviš, da jih je v resnici pred teboj svoje mesto rezerviralo že 70," pripovedujejo prebivalci prestolnice.



Prazna turistična meka, mesto Varadero. Zaradi pandemije tujih turistov ni. Foto: AP

Rezervacija mest "slamnatih kupcev" za prave stane približno 50 CUP, kar pomeni 1,7 evra. "To je zelo malo glede na čas, ki ga porabimo za stanje v vrsti," je pojasnil eden izmed colerosov, zato so se mnogi znašli še drugače – sami odidejo v trgovino po najnujnejše stvari in jih nato po dvojni ceni prodajo naprej. "Kupim piščanca, mleto mesto, majonezo, špagete, kar koli je na voljo," je pojasnil Marco Jimenez, ki meni, da je kar tri četrtine colerosov preprodajalcev. A za to početje je komunistični režim uvedel visoke kazni, saj želi preprodajo hrano in pripomočkov omejiti. V trgovinah mora zato vsak kupec pokazati svojo osebno izkaznico – s tem želijo tudi preprečiti, da bi se isti ljudje dvakrat v dnevu postavili v vrsto. Edino,

česar na policah kubanskih trgovin nikoli ne zmanjka, je ustekleničena voda. V nekaterih trgovinah ta proizvod predstavlja kar 70 odstotkov vse ponudbe.



Protest proti ameriškim sankcijam. Foto: Reuters

Kakšen je doseg uporniškega gibanja San Isidro?

Z reformo v začetku leta so se povišale plače zaposlenih v javnem sektorju in pokojnine, ne pa tudi plače preostalim 40 odstotkom delovne sile, ki je zaposlena v zasebnem sektorju in kmetijstvu. To je razburilo mnoge v tujini živeče Kubance in oporečnike, strokovnjake pa napeljalo k napovedi, da je kubansko gospodarstvo tik pred popolnim razpadom.

Revolucionarna vlada je le veliko gledališče, ki je svoja vrata odprlo pred 60 leti in še vedno deluje. Spremenili ne bodo ničesar in delali bodo vse, kar jim pade na pamet, dokler bodo lahko imeli razmere pod nadzorom. Neimenovani profesor iz Havane

Kot še piše Financial Times, se v državi v zadnjem času vse bolj krepi gibanje San Isidro, ki ga sestavljajo različne skupine aktivistov, novinarjev, akademikov in neodvisnih umetnikov. Njihovo povezovanje in usklajeno delovanje je omogočil razmah medmrežja. Gibanje pritiska na vlado, naj dopusti večjo svobodo izražanja. Nedavno so zato pred ministrstvom za kulturo izvedli demonstracije, kar je bilo za državo doslej nepredstavljivo, in manjši protest v revnem predelu Havane, kjer so preprečili policiji aretacijo nekega raperja. Prav med kongresom komunistične stranke pa je še ena ločena skupina na vzhodu države v znak nasprotovanja uradni politiki izvedla gladovno stavko. Oblast se je na te akcije odzvala z nekaj aretacijami in medijsko propagando proti aktivistom v državnih medijih.

"Konec vladavine bratov Castro je polariziral reakcije Kubancev. Goreči privrženci partije izražajo neomajno zvestobo sistemu, nasprotniki pa v prihodnost gledajo cinično in črnogledo. Revolucionarna vlada je le veliko gledališče, ki je svoja vrata odprlo pred 60 leti in še vedno deluje. Spremenili ne bodo ničesar in delali bodo vse, kar jim pade na pamet, dokler bodo lahko imeli razmere pod nadzorom. Ljudje so prikrajšani za mnogo stvari, v družbi vlada veliko nezadovoljstvo, a nihče razen redkih se ne odpravi na ulico. Vedo namreč, da bo oblast vsako akcijo zatrla s še več policije," je na vprašanje, ali bi lahko bilo gibanje San Isidro znanilec družbenih sprememb na Kubi, dejal profesor iz Havane, ki zaradi varnosti ni želel biti imenovan.



ZDA in Kuba so diplomatske odnose vzpostavile leta 2016, v času Baracka Obame in Raula Castra. Foto: AP

Joe Biden preseneča z ignoriranjem Kube

A do spremembe ni prišlo le v Havani, ampak tudi v Beli hiši v Washingtonu. Demokrat Joe Biden je med predvolilno kampanjo obljubil, da bo zrahljal nekatere ukrepe proti Kubi, ki jih je uvedel njegov predhodnik Donald Trump, zato so si Kubanci obetali vsaj ponovno vzpostavitev letalskih povezav in sprostitev bančnih nakazil, če že ne popolne vzpostavitve diplomatskih odnosov med državama, do katere je prišlo v času administracije Baracka Obame leta 2016. V času Trumpa so se ameriške sankcije namreč močno zaostrole, saj so finančne transakcije z otokom postale nemogoče, s tem pa so sorodniki z ZDA izgubili možnost, da prek Western Uniona nakazujejo denar v domovino. ZDA so prepovedale tudi obiske ladij za križarjenje na Kubi, ki je sicer od ameriške obale oddaljena le 90 milj (145 kilometrov).

A za zdaj pričakovanja Kubancev po otoplitvi odnosov ostajajo neuresničena, kar preseneča tudi nekatere ameriške novinarje. New York Times tako piše, da Biden in njegova ekipa od januarja nista naredila še niti ene poteze, s katero bi podala roko Kubi, še več – Bela hiša je prejšnji mesec celo izjavila, da Kuba trenutno v kalejdoskopu notranjih in zunanje-političnih težav ni ameriška prioriteta. Poleg tega Bidnu ustreza, da je trenutno na čelu vplivnega senatnega odbora za zunanje zadeve še vedno Američan kubanskih korenin – prej je bil to republikanec Marco Rubio, v novi sestavi kongresa pa je to demokrat Robert Menendez. Zato se demokrati ne želijo preveč vpletati, da ne bi na prihodnjih volitvah na Floridi prišlo do sprememb v senatu in bi izgubili kakšen pomemben sedež. "Biden ni naredil niti tistih sprememb, ki so se mnogim poslovnem zdele samoumevne. Za umik omejitev glede nakazil iz ZDA na Kubo mu ne bi bilo treba niti vzpostaviti stika s kubansko vlado," je dejal John Kavulich, predsednik ameriško-kubanskega trgovinskega sveta.

Biden ni naredil niti tistih sprememb, ki so se mnogim poslovnem zdele samoumevne. Za umik omejitev glede nakazil iz ZDA na Kubo mu ne bi bilo treba niti vzpostaviti stika s kubansko vlado. John Kavulich

Dve kubanski cepivi v zadnji fazi kliničnih preizkusov

Kako je državo prizadela pandemija? Kubi se je obrestovalo, da ima dolgo zgodovino razvoja zdravstva in t. i. zdravstvene diplomacije, prek katere pošilja zdravnike v druge države. Čeprav je najhujša gospodarska kriza po padcu Sovjetske zveze izpraznila police lekarn, pa se je vseeno lotila razvoja svojih cepiv proti covidu-19. Kot piše Guardian, je Kuba celo na poti, da postane najmanjša država na svetu s svojim cepivom - izmed 27 cepiv po vsem svetu, ki so v zadnji fazi razvoja, sta kar dve plod kubanskega znanja.

"Če želimo ohraniti suverenost, potrebujemo lastna cepiva," je dejal Vicente Verez, direktor instituta Finlay, ki je razvil cepivo Soberana 2 (Vladarica 2), ki je izmed petih kubanskih kandidatov najdlje v razvoju. "V devetih mesecih smo prišli od ideje za razvoj cepiva do tretje faze kliničnih preizkusov," je dodal, v odgovor na vprašanje, kaj jih žene, pa je citiral revolucionarja Ernesta "Cheja" Guevarro, ki je dejal: "Pravega revolucionarja vodi velik občutek ljubezni."



Soberana 2 - kubansko cepivo proti covidu-19, ki najbolj obeta. Foto: AP

V tej fazi trenutno v Havani sodeluje 44.000 prostovoljcev, podobno število v mestu Santiago na vzhodu države preizkuša cepivo Abdala, ki so ga poimenovali po pesmi Joseja Martija, ki ima na otoku status narodnega heroja. Hkrati v Havani poskusno cepijo tudi 150.000 zdravstvenih delavcev.

Kubanska "zdravstvena fronta" se je začela leta 1981, kar je le pet let po ustanovitvi prvega biotehnoškega podjetja Genentech. Pri razvoju cepiva proti covidu-19 sodelujejo vsi največji domači strokovnjaki s tega področja, mnogi med njimi so se v preteklosti šolali v Sovjetski zvezi.

Letos je število okužb poskočilo

A tudi pri tem se Kuba ne more izogniti grenki geopolitični resničnosti. Ameriški embargo namreč omejuje, katero zdravstveno opremo in pripomočke lahko Kuba uvaža. Kljub množici pozivom človekoljubnih organizacij, naj ZDA med pandemijo ukinejo sankcije proti Kubi, jih je Washington v zadnjih 12 mesecih celo še okrepil. Trumpova administracija je Kubo namreč januarja uvrstila na ameriški seznam držav, ki podpirajo terorizem, zato je težko najti že banko, prek katere bi se lahko izvajale transakcije v tujino.

Kuba je lani poročala le o 12.225 potrjenih primerih okužbe in 146 smrtih covidnih bolnikov, kar je ena najnižjih števil med državami na zahodni polobli. A nato so se stvari poslabšale. Novembra, ko so znova uvedli komercialne polete, vlada nekaj tednov za vstop v državo ni zahtevala opravljenega PCR-testa, zato so okužbe poskočile, saj je virus na otok prineslo mnogo kubanskih izseljencev iz ZDA. Januarja letos so tako na Kubi imeli več potrjenih primerov kot v celotnem letu 2020, trenutno pa v povprečju naštejejo po tisoč okužb na dan.



Kaj bo Kubi prinesla prihodnost? Foto: AP

Cepljenih je le okoli 100.000 ljudi, kar pomeni, da je Kuba na spodnjem delu precepljenosti med latinskoameriškimi državami, v katerih je povprečno en odmerek cepiva dobilo 12 odstotkov ljudi. Oblast je bila deležna tudi kritik, ker ni pristopila k programu Covax, ki zagotavlja cepiva revnejšim državam. Kuba namreč stavi na odobritev in proizvodnjo svojega cepiva Soberana 2, saj naj bi letos proizvedli kar 100 milijonov odmerkov, kar bi bilo dovolj za celotno populacijo in še za izvoz. Strokovnjaki so zato prepričani, da bi lahko država zadostno precepljenost dosegla do konca leta.

Kubanskemu znanju zaupajo tudi nekatere druge države. Venezuelski minister za zdravje je tako pred dnevi napovedal, da bodo tudi pri njih začeli klinični preizkus kubanskega cepiva Abdala. Če bo šlo vse po načrtih, nameravajo tudi proizvesti štiri milijone odmerkov tega cepiva.

Portal Contacto Politico

Buenos Aires, Argentina

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El pago de la deuda, un dolor de cabeza para Cuba en una pandemia

Nuria Tobia



Debilitado por el endurecimiento del embargo estadounidense y la ausencia de turistas debido a la epidemia, Cuba ha dejado de pagar a sus acreedores internacionales, pero estos últimos esperan negociar un regreso al buen camino en los próximos meses.

Con respecto a los fondos adeudados a 14 países entre los que se encuentran Francia, España y Japón, el Club de París -organismo que gestiona las discusiones- pretende negociar entre mayo y junio un nuevo cronograma de pagos un año después de la demora concedida en 2020, dijo una fuente diplomática. . Agencia de prensa de Francia.

En cuanto a la deuda con acreedores privados, gestionada por el London Club, el fondo de inversión CRF I Ltd, que posee la mayor participación (1.200 millones de euros, o 1.500 millones de dólares EE.UU.), acaba de realizar una oferta de reestructuración con un descuento del 60% a el presidente. Miguel Díaz-Canel, en una carta, cuya copia fue obtenida por AFP.

Durante la última conferencia del Partido Comunista que marcó su retiro, Raúl Castro afirmó que el país quería “reanudar el respeto a sus obligaciones financieras internacionales cuando la economía comience a recuperarse”.

Sin embargo, “hay factores externos que afectan actualmente la balanza de pagos cubana: la epidemia y las sanciones de Estados Unidos”, comenta Pavel Vidal, economista de la Universidad de Javriana en Cali (Colombia).

Para Cuba, “la situación es más complicada” que en 2020, agrega el economista Omar Everlini Pérez, del Centro Cristiano de Reflexión y Diálogo.

Entonces, “¿Por qué vamos a pagar?” Continuado. “Es cierto que hay voluntad de pagar, pero por otro lado, es cierto que la gente no tiene por qué comer”.

– Pidiendo clemencia –

El PIB cayó un 11% en 2020 y las importaciones, que cubren el 80% de las necesidades, se encuentran en sus niveles más bajos desde 2009, lo que agrava la escasez. “No podemos pedir un esfuerzo adicional a un país envuelto por la epidemia”, dijo Pérez.

En concreto, se trata de un llamado al indulto que lanzó el presidente Díaz-Canel en la reciente Cumbre Iberoamericana.

Refiriéndose al embargo estadounidense en vigor desde 1962, dijo: “Los países en desarrollo soportan una carga de deuda externa insoportable, ya pagada mil veces, y algunos de ellos también sufren los efectos de medidas coercitivas unilaterales”.

Desde hace varios meses, el gobierno hace campaña, en las redes sociales y a través de manifestaciones en Cuba y en la diáspora cubana, para exigir el levantamiento de la prohibición, reforzada bajo Donald Trump. El problema de la deuda de los países pobres vuelve a estar en primer plano con la pandemia: el G20 ha concedido a 74 países un aplazamiento de un año, el más reciente renovado por seis meses.

Un viejo automóvil estadounidense en una calle de La Habana, 3 de mayo de 2021 en Cuba (AFP – YAMIL LAGE)

El Banco Mundial y el Fondo Monetario Internacional quieren estar del lado de los países vulnerables, pero Cuba no es miembro de ninguno de los dos organismos y se encuentra a la vanguardia de los acreedores.

– ‘Retorno suave’ –

El acuerdo con el Club de París en 2015 canceló \$ 8.5 millones de los \$ 11.100 millones adeudados, y el resto se transfirió a proyectos de inversión o en fases hasta 2033 (Cuba debía reembolsar \$ 85 millones en 2020).



Un cubano vende ensaladas y jugos de frutas en una calle de La Habana el 3 de mayo de 2021 (AFP – YAMIL LAGE)

Lo que se necesita completar para poner a la isla, en default desde 1986, en el camino correcto después del alivio de la deuda de China en 2011 (\$ 6 mil millones), México en 2013 (\$ 487 millones) y Rusia en 2014 (\$ 35 mil millones).

Sin embargo, el país ha estado en default con Brasil desde 2018 y le debe a Argentina 2.700 millones, una deuda que se remonta a la década de 1970.

Para John Kavulich, presidente del Consejo Económico Cubano-Americano, “a partir de ahora será necesaria otra reprogramación (de la deuda del Club de París) y los países participantes están preparados para ello” porque “tienen poca influencia y se conoce a Cuba”.

En cuanto a la deuda comercial, CRF I Ltd propose en su carta "un acuerdo conciliatorio que pondría fin a los costos, la mala publicidad y el estigma que agobia a Cuba, al tiempo que facilitaría un posible regreso sin contratiempos a los mercados financieros internacionales".

Durante once años, el fondo intentó sin éxito negociar un acuerdo. En el pasado, sus programas no fueron escuchados y sus procedimientos legales, que se iniciaron en Londres en 2020, aún están en curso.

AFP

Paris, France

5 May 2021

Régler ses dettes, un casse-tête pour Cuba en pleine pandémie

Affaibli par le durcissement de l'embargo américain et l'absence de touristes avec la pandémie, Cuba a cessé de rembourser ses créanciers internationaux, mais ces derniers espèrent négocier un retour sur les rails dans les prochains mois.

Concernant l'argent dû à 14 pays dont la France, l'Espagne et le Japon, le Club de Paris - l'instance qui gère les discussions - compte négocier entre mai et juin un nouveau calendrier de paiements après un moratoire d'un an accordé en 2020, a indiqué à l'AFP une source diplomatique.

Quant à la dette aux créanciers privés, gérée par le Club de Londres, le fond d'investissement CRF I Ltd, qui en détient la plus grosse part (1,2 milliard d'euros, soit 1,5 md USD), vient de faire une offre de restructuration avec décote de 60% au président Miguel Diaz-Canel, dans un courrier dont l'AFP a obtenu copie.

Lors du récent congrès du Parti communiste marquant son départ en retraite, Raul Castro a assuré que le pays voulait "recommencer à respecter (ses) engagements financiers internationaux quand commencera à se redresser l'économie".

Mais "il y a des facteurs exogènes qui pèsent actuellement sur la balance des paiements cubaine : la pandémie et les sanctions américaines", commente Pavel Vidal, économiste à l'université Javeriana de Cali (Colombie).

Pour Cuba, "la situation est encore plus compliquée" qu'en 2020, renchérit l'économiste Omar Everlery Pérez, du Centre chrétien de réflexion et dialogue.

Donc "avec quoi va-t-on payer?" poursuit-il. "C'est vrai qu'il y a une volonté de payer, mais d'un autre côté, c'est vrai que les gens n'ont pas à manger".

Appel à la clémence

Le Produit intérieur brut (PIB) a chuté de 11% en 2020 et les importations, qui couvrent 80% des besoins, sont au plus bas depuis 2009, aggravant les pénuries. "On ne peut pas demander un effort supplémentaire à un pays noyé par la pandémie", estime M. Pérez.

C'est justement un appel à la clémence qu'a lancé le président Diaz-Canel lors du récent sommet ibéro-américain.

"Les pays en développement portent le fardeau insupportable d'une dette extérieure, déjà mille fois payée, et certains subissent en outre l'impact de mesures coercitives unilatérales", a-t-il déclaré en référence à l'embargo américain, appliqué depuis 1962.

Depuis plusieurs mois, le gouvernement fait campagne, sur les réseaux sociaux et via des manifestations à

Cuba et dans les pays de la diaspora cubaine, pour exiger la levée de l'embargo, renforcé sous Donald Trump.

La question de la dette des pays pauvres est revenue au premier plan avec la pandémie : le G20 a accordé à 74 pays un moratoire d'un an, récemment renouvelé pour six mois.

La Banque mondiale et le Fonds monétaire international (FMI) se veulent au chevet des pays fragilisés mais Cuba n'est membre d'aucune des deux instances et se retrouve en première ligne face aux créanciers.

"Retour en douceur"

L'accord avec le Club de Paris en 2015 avait effacé 8,5 sur 11,1 milliards de dollars dus, le reste étant converti en projets d'investissement ou échelonné jusqu'en 2033 (Cuba devait rembourser 85 millions en 2020).

De quoi achever de remettre l'île, en défaut de paiement depuis 1986, sur le droit chemin après les effacements de dette par la Chine en 2011 (6 mds USD), le Mexique en 2013 (487 millions) et la Russie en 2014 (35 mds).

Le pays est toutefois en défaut de paiement avec le Brésil depuis 2018 et doit à l'Argentine 2,7 milliards, une dette remontant aux années 1970.

Pour John Kavulich, président du Conseil économique cubano-américain, "désormais, un autre rééchelonnement (de la dette du Club de Paris) sera nécessaire, et les pays participants y sont préparés", car ils "ont peu de moyens de pression et Cuba le sait".

Quant à la dette commerciale, CRF I Ltd propose dans son courrier "un accord de règlement qui mettra fin aux coûts, à la mauvaise publicité et aux stigmates pesant sur Cuba, tout en facilitant un éventuel retour en douceur sur les marchés financiers internationaux".

Depuis onze ans, le fonds tente en vain de négocier un accord. Par le passé, ses offres sont restées lettre morte et son action en justice, lancée à Londres en 2020, est toujours en cours.

AFP

Paris, France

5 May 2021

Pagar la deuda, un dolor de cabeza para Cuba en tiempos de pandemia



Una fila de persona que esperan para comprar comida en una calle de La Habana el 22 de marzo de 2021. (AFP)

Los acreedores de la deuda externa cubana quieren volver a la carga y negociar en próximos meses con el gobierno de la isla, que tiene voluntad de pago, pero enfrenta una complicada situación por el endurecimiento del embargo estadounidense y por la ausencia de turistas debido a la pandemia.

Cuba había logrado encarrilar en parte la moratoria que arrastraba, pero las dificultades que enfrenta actualmente la llevaron a dejar de pagar adeudos a países acreedores, agrupados en el Club de París, así como a entidades privadas, que gestionan esos montos a través del Club de Londres. Ambos grupos se proponen ahora negociar con la isla.

El Club de París tiene la intención de proponer entre mayo y junio un nuevo calendario de pagos, dijo a la AFP una fuente diplomática.

En tanto, el fondo de inversión CRF I Ltd, que detenta la mayor parte (1.500 millones de dólares) de deuda en manos de privados, acaba hacer una oferta al presidente Miguel Díaz-Canel, que supone una reestructura con quita del 60%, según una carta de la que la AFP obtuvo una copia.

- Situación "más complicada" -

Pero en Cuba "la situación está todavía más complicada" que en 2020, señaló el economista Omar Everleny Pérez, del centro cristiano de Reflexión y Diálogo.

"¿De dónde vamos a pagar? Es cierto que hay voluntad de pago" de parte del gobierno, pero también "es cierto que las personas no tienen comida", reflexionó.

El PIB se desplomó 11% en 2020, su peor caída en casi 30 años. Las importaciones, que cubren el 80% del consumo del país, son las más bajas desde 2009. La escasez se agravó y las colas son más largas frente a las tiendas.

"No le puedes pedir a un país que está ahogado con esta pandemia que haga un esfuerzo adicional", consideró Pérez.

Durante la reciente Cumbre Iberoamericana, Díaz-Canel hizo un llamado a "un orden económico internacional justo".

"Los países en desarrollo cargan el insostenible peso de una deuda externa, pagada ya mil veces, y algunos, adicionalmente, sufren el impacto de medidas coercitivas unilaterales", declaró en referencia al embargo estadounidense sobre la isla desde 1962.

Con la pandemia, el tema de la deuda de países pobres volvió a la palestra: el G20 acordó una moratoria de un año a 74 países, renovada recientemente por seis meses.

El Banco Mundial y el FMI tienen líneas de crédito disponibles, pero Cuba no es parte de estos organismos y está sola frente a sus acreedores.

En 2015, el Club de París condonó 8.500 millones de dólares de deuda sobre el total de 11.100 millones que le debía Cuba. El pago del pasivo restante se escalonó hasta 2033, y en 2020 el Club de París otorgó al gobierno cubano una moratoria de un año.

Antes, Cuba recibió condonaciones por 6.000 millones de dólares por parte de China en 2011, 487 millones por parte de México en 2013 y 35.000 millones por parte de Rusia en 2014.

El país está en default con Brasil desde 2018 y le debe a Argentina 2.700 millones de dólares por una deuda contraída en los años 1970.

- "Retorno sin problemas" -

"Yo creo que sí hay voluntad" de cumplir con sus compromisos, coincidió Pavel Vidal, economista cubano de la universidad Javeriana de Cali (Colombia).

Pero, "hay otros factores exógenos que en estos momentos influyen en la balanza de pagos cubana", como la pandemia y las sanciones estadounidenses.

Desde hace meses, el gobierno hace campaña, en redes sociales y con manifestaciones dentro y fuera de, Cuba para exigir el fin del embargo, reforzado durante el gobierno de Donald Trump.

"Si en más de seis décadas esa política cruel ha provocado carencias a la familia cubana, en el último año, en medio de la pandemia, ha pretendido casi asfixiarnos", tuiteó Díaz-Canel.

Para John Kavulich, presidente del Consejo Económico y Comercial Cuba-Estados Unidos, "será necesaria otra reprogramación (de la deuda) y los países participantes (ndlr: acreedores) están preparados" porque "tienen poca ventaja y Cuba lo sabe".

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Foreign

Biden's first 100 days in foreign policy are hamstrung by Trump's last 100

From Iran negotiations to Cuba policy to refugee admissions, the Biden administration is grappling with the detritus Trump left behind.



President Joe Biden removes his mask before speaking. | Drew Angerer/Getty Images

By **NAHAL TOOSI**

It was just a week before he'd be out of the job, but former President Donald Trump managed to construct yet another political hurdle for his successor.

Cuba, the Trump administration announced, was being relabeled a state sponsor of terrorism after having been taken off that list more than five years earlier. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the decision was rooted partly in Cuba's unwillingness to extradite some fugitives, including members of Colombia's National Liberation Army.

Critics retorted that the legal basis was highly questionable. Either way, one thing was for sure: re-listing Cuba would make it even harder for incoming President Joe Biden and his aides to salvage once-promising ties between Washington and Havana.

As Biden marks his first 100 days as president later this week, some of his foreign policy goals are proving trickier to reach in part due to moves by Trump, many of which took place in the waning days of the outgoing administration. As a result, Trump has managed to hamstring the new president on multiple fronts, from Cuba policy to refugee admissions to negotiations with Iran.

Trump is hardly the first president to try to cement his legacy with a flurry of last-minute actions. Still, when a president tries to handcuff his successor, that can feed into the notion that U.S. foreign policy is inherently unstable, damaging America's global reputation in the long run, former U.S. officials and analysts say.

"This perceived instability or changeability of American foreign policy from one administration to the next means that foreign countries, including allies, feel like they need to discount American policies and promises and hedge their bets on the United States," said Michael Singh, a former George W. Bush administration official now with the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. "And the more politically polarized we are at home, the more this tendency grows overseas, and it's tough and costly to reverse."

Many of the decisions made by the Trump administration, such as ramping up pressure on Iran or China, were done so publicly, with Trump aides insisting that the reasons were purely in the national interest. As a result, Biden administration officials prepared themselves for a difficult obstacle course.

Yet, many of those same officials privately say they have been surprised by the number and spread of political landmines Trump left behind. The Trump moves have made it much harder for Biden and his team to, as they put it, “build back better.”

Earlier this month, the Biden administration took a public relations hit as it see-sawed over how many refugees it would admit to the United States. The administration, which earlier promised to admit up to 62,500 refugees through this fiscal year — with the goal of eventually reaching an annual cap of 125,000 — said it would stick to the Trump-era goal of 15,000, before a backlash from progressives forced it to reverse itself and promise a yet-to-be-unveiled higher figure.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki blamed the confusion in part on “the decimated refugee admissions program we inherited” from Trump.

Activists question whether Trump is directly to blame for what refugee ceiling the Biden administration chooses. The White House, after all, also was concerned about the political optics of letting in refugees as it struggles to deal with a growing number of asylum seekers at the U.S. border with Mexico, even though the refugee and asylum programs are different.

But none doubt that the refugee admissions system was essentially leveled under Trump, leaving Biden aides with a Herculean rebuilding task. It’s a mission that will cover everything from hiring new staff to finding new locations for offices closed under Trump to addressing the root causes of migration from places like Central America.

The reality, many activists acknowledge, is that no matter the target figure of refugee admissions, it will be a long time before the Biden administration can actually admit that many people.

“It’s definitely going to take more than 100 days,” said Becca Heller, executive director of the International Refugee Assistance Project. She added that rebuilding America’s reputation as a “beacon for other countries on what meaningful refugee protection looks like” could be the most challenging task of all for Biden given the often-false claims Trump made about dangers that refugees posed.

Progressive activists in particular have been unhappy with Biden’s failure to rejoin the Iran nuclear deal within these first three months. To some extent, however, the Trump administration complicated Biden’s plans.

Trump campaigned on the idea that the nuclear deal with Iran was bad news, and he abandoned it in 2018. In doing so, he reimposed nuclear-related sanctions on Iran that had been lifted by the deal. But he also added numerous new economic sanctions on Iran, many of which were categorized as targeting Iran over issues not related to its nuclear program, such as its support for terrorism or abuse of human rights. In his final months on the job, Pompeo seemed to delight in announcing new penalties directed at Iran’s Islamist regime.

As Biden administration negotiators are looking at ways to rejoin the deal, unwinding that thicket of sanctions is proving a major stumbling block.

Iranian officials have argued that all of the Trump-era sanctions must be lifted. U.S. officials say that’s not going to happen because many were legitimately imposed over concerns unrelated to Iran’s nuclear program.

The Biden team, however, suspects that Trump aides misleadingly labeled some sanctions to make it harder to lift them and thus prevent a return to the deal. (Some former Trump administration officials have taken to Twitter and other forums to deny any of the sanctions were inappropriately categorized.)

A senior State Department official recently told reporters that trying to nail down the origin and intent of each sanction imposed during the Trump years is “difficult work.”

“It’s not as if when the former administration reimposed sanctions, they labeled them: ‘These are sanctions that are consistent with the [Iran deal], and these are the kind of sanctions that are not consistent with the [deal],’” the official said.

The Florida factor

People who have worked with Biden say he’s always been attuned to the politics of the decisions he makes and that that hasn’t changed since he’s become president. Many of the decisions he’s made, or not made, partly reflect his awareness of how they would play politically and his sense that other issues need to be prioritized.

Given that he’s dealing with the coronavirus pandemic, the resulting economic damage and the challenge posed by a rising China — itself a major and highly complicated foreign policy inheritance — other issues may not seem worth the immediate expenditure of political capital. The fact that the Senate is split 50-50 between Republicans and Democrats also stays his hand to some extent.

Combine those factors with the political hurdles left behind by the Trump team, and Biden appears nowhere near ready to make any major moves on issues like Cuba.

It was during Barack Obama’s presidency, when Biden was vice president, that the U.S. re-established diplomatic ties with Cuba after a break of more than 50 years. Obama removed Cuba from the terrorism sponsors list and took numerous other steps to increase trade and travel with the Communist-led country.

Trump reversed nearly everything Obama did, and in several ways went even further than many of his White House predecessors in cracking down on Cuba, although he did not sever diplomatic relations. One decision Trump made in the run-up to the November 2020 presidential election severely restricted the ability of people in the Cuban diaspora to send money to relatives on the island — what are known as remittances.

Advocates of engaging the regime in Havana said Trump’s moves, including post-election ones such as returning Cuba to the state sponsors of terrorism list, were really about U.S. politics, not foreign policy. Issues related to Cuba resonate in particular in Florida, a swing state that is home to many Cuban exiles with hardline views on the Cuban regime. Trump won Florida in 2020, and Republicans hope to turn it solidly red in the coming years.

“There was no factual basis to merit the (terrorism) designation that the public is aware of,” said Ricardo Herrero, executive director of the Cuba Study Group. “It was designed to hamstring the Biden administration and set the stage for the next election in Florida.”

Cuba watchers in touch with the Biden administration say they’ve been told that the Cuba policy is under review but that other issues are simply more important right now. Wait too long to make major moves related to Cuba, however, and the Biden team will run into the campaign season for the 2022 midterms, with Republicans eager to paint the president and other Democrats as soft on communism and socialism.

“I don’t know when they’re going to have a good moment on Cuba,” John Kavulich, president of the nonpartisan U.S.-Cuba Trade and Economic Council, said of Biden and his aides. “I don’t think they know, and I don’t think anyone knows. And anyone who says they know, doesn’t know.”

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Les 100 premiers jours de politique étrangère de Biden sont entravés par les 100 derniers de Trump

Alors que Biden marque ses 100 premiers jours en tant que président plus tard cette semaine, certains de ses objectifs de politique étrangère se révèlent plus difficiles à atteindre en partie en raison des mesures prises par Trump, dont beaucoup ont eu lieu dans les derniers jours de l'administration sortante. En conséquence, Trump a réussi à entraver le nouveau président sur plusieurs fronts, de la politique cubaine aux admissions de réfugiés aux négociations avec l'Iran.

Trump n'est pas le premier président à essayer de cimenter son héritage avec une vague d'actions de dernière minute. Pourtant, lorsqu'un président tente de menotter son successeur, cela peut alimenter l'idée que la politique étrangère américaine est intrinsèquement instable, ce qui nuit à la réputation mondiale de l'Amérique à long terme, affirment d'anciens responsables et analystes américains.

« Cette instabilité perçue ou cette évolutivité de la politique étrangère américaine d'une administration à l'autre signifie que les pays étrangers, y compris les alliés, ont le sentiment de devoir ignorer les politiques et les promesses américaines et couvrir leurs paris sur les États-Unis », a déclaré Michael Singh, un ancien George W. Bush est maintenant fonctionnaire du Washington Institute for Near East Policy. « Et plus nous sommes politiquement polarisés chez nous, plus cette tendance se développe à l'étranger, et il est difficile et coûteux de renverser la vapeur. »

De nombreuses décisions prises par l'administration Trump, telles que l'intensification de la pression sur l'Iran ou la Chine, l'ont été publiquement, les collaborateurs de Trump insistant sur le fait que les raisons étaient purement dans l'intérêt national. En conséquence, les responsables de l'administration Biden se sont préparés à un parcours d'obstacles difficile.

Pourtant, bon nombre de ces mêmes responsables disent en privé qu'ils ont été surpris par le nombre et la propagation des mines terrestres politiques que Trump a laissées derrière lui. Les mouvements de Trump ont rendu la tâche beaucoup plus difficile pour Biden et son équipe pour, comme ils le disent, « reconstruire mieux ».

Plus tôt ce mois-ci, l'administration Biden a été touchée par les relations publiques en déterminant le nombre de réfugiés qu'elle admettrait aux États-Unis. L'administration, qui avait promis plus tôt d'admettre jusqu'à 62500 réfugiés au cours de cet exercice – dans le but d'atteindre éventuellement un plafond annuel de 125000 – a déclaré qu'elle s'en tiendrait à l'objectif de 15000 de l'ère Trump, avant qu'une réaction des progressistes ne l'oblige à s'inverser et promettre un chiffre plus élevé encore à dévoiler.

L'attachée de presse de la Maison Blanche, Jen Psaki, a imputé la confusion en partie au « programme d'admission de réfugiés décimé dont nous avons hérité » de Trump.

Les militants se demandent si Trump est directement responsable du plafond de réfugiés choisi par l'administration Biden. La Maison Blanche, après tout, était également préoccupée par l'optique politique de l'accueil des réfugiés alors qu'elle lutte pour faire face à un nombre croissant de demandeurs d'asile à la frontière américaine avec le Mexique, même si les programmes de réfugiés et d'asile sont différents.

Mais nul doute que le système d'admission des réfugiés a été essentiellement nivelé sous Trump, laissant les assistants de Biden avec une tâche de reconstruction herculéenne. C'est une mission qui couvrira tout, de l'embauche de nouveaux employés à la recherche de nouveaux emplacements pour les bureaux fermés sous Trump en passant par la lutte contre les causes profondes de la migration en provenance d'endroits comme l'Amérique centrale.

La réalité, reconnaissent de nombreux militants, est que, quel que soit le chiffre cible des admissions de réfugiés, il faudra longtemps avant que l'administration Biden puisse admettre que de nombreuses personnes.

« Cela va certainement prendre plus de 100 jours », a déclaré Becca Heller, directrice exécutive du International Refugee Assistance Project. Elle a ajouté que reconstruire la réputation de l'Amérique en tant que « phare pour les autres pays sur ce à quoi ressemble une protection significative des réfugiés » pourrait être la tâche la plus difficile de toutes pour Biden étant donné les affirmations souvent fausses que Trump a faites sur les dangers que représentent les réfugiés.

Les militants progressistes en particulier ont été mécontents de l'incapacité de Biden à rejoindre l'accord nucléaire iranien au cours de ces trois premiers mois. Dans une certaine mesure, cependant, l'administration Trump a compliqué les plans de Biden.

Trump a fait campagne sur l'idée que l'accord nucléaire avec l'Iran était une mauvaise nouvelle, et il l'a abandonné en 2018. Ce faisant, il a réimposé les sanctions liées au nucléaire contre l'Iran qui avaient été levées par l'accord. Mais il a également ajouté de nombreuses nouvelles sanctions économiques contre l'Iran, dont beaucoup ont été classées comme visant l'Iran pour des questions non liées à son programme nucléaire, telles que son soutien au terrorisme ou les violations des droits de l'homme. Au cours de ses derniers mois de travail, Pompeo a semblé se réjouir d'annoncer de nouvelles sanctions à l'encontre du régime islamiste iranien.

Alors que les négociateurs de l'administration Biden cherchent des moyens de rejoindre l'accord, le dénouement de ce bosquet de sanctions s'avère une pierre d'achoppement majeure.

Les responsables iraniens ont fait valoir que toutes les sanctions de l'ère Trump devaient être levées. Les responsables américains disent que cela n'arrivera pas parce que beaucoup ont été légitimement imposés pour des préoccupations sans rapport avec le programme nucléaire iranien.

Cependant, l'équipe de Biden soupçonne que les assistants de Trump ont qualifié de manière trompeuse certaines sanctions pour rendre plus difficile leur levée et ainsi empêcher un retour à l'accord. (Certains anciens responsables de l'administration Trump ont renvoyé sur Twitter et sur d'autres forums pour refuser aucune des sanctions n'était classée de manière inappropriée.)

Un haut responsable du département d'État a récemment déclaré aux journalistes qu'essayer de déterminer l'origine et l'intention de chaque sanction imposée pendant les années Trump était un «travail difficile».

«Ce n'est pas comme si lorsque l'ancienne administration avait réimposé les sanctions, elle les avait étiquetées: « Ce sont des sanctions conformes à la [Iran deal], et ce sont les types de sanctions qui ne sont pas compatibles avec la [deal] », A déclaré le fonctionnaire.

Le facteur Floride

Les gens qui ont travaillé avec Biden disent qu'il a toujours été à l'écoute de la politique des décisions qu'il prend et que cela n'a pas changé depuis qu'il est devenu président. Bon nombre des décisions qu'il a prises, ou non, reflètent en partie sa conscience de la façon dont elles joueraient politiquement et son sentiment que d'autres questions doivent être priorisées.

Étant donné qu'il est aux prises avec la pandémie de coronavirus, les dommages économiques qui en résultent et le défi posé par la montée de la Chine – elle-même un héritage majeur et très complexe de la politique étrangère – d'autres problèmes peuvent ne pas sembler valoir les dépenses immédiates en capital politique. Le fait que le Sénat soit partagé à 50-50 entre républicains et démocrates lui reste également dans une certaine mesure.

Combinez ces facteurs avec les obstacles politiques laissés par l'équipe Trump, et Biden semble loin d'être prêt à prendre des mesures majeures sur des questions comme Cuba.

C'est sous la présidence de Barack Obama, alors que Biden était vice-président, que les États-Unis ont rétabli leurs relations diplomatiques avec Cuba après une interruption de plus de 50 ans. Obama a retiré Cuba de la liste des sponsors du terrorisme et a pris de nombreuses autres mesures pour accroître le commerce et les voyages avec le pays dirigé par les communistes.

Trump a inversé presque tout ce qu'Obama a fait et est allé encore plus loin que nombre de ses prédécesseurs à la Maison Blanche en réprimant Cuba, bien qu'il n'ait pas rompu les relations diplomatiques. Une décision prise par Trump à la veille de l'élection présidentielle de novembre 2020 a gravement restreint la capacité des membres de la diaspora cubaine d'envoyer de l'argent à des proches sur l'île – ce que l'on appelle les envois de fonds.

Les partisans de l'engagement du régime à La Havane ont déclaré que les mesures de Trump, y compris celles post-électorales telles que le retour de Cuba sur la liste des États sponsors du terrorisme, concernaient vraiment la politique américaine, et non la politique étrangère. Les questions liées à Cuba résonnent en particulier en Floride, un État swing qui abrite de nombreux exilés cubains ayant des opinions radicales sur le régime cubain. Trump a remporté la Floride en 2020, et les républicains espèrent la rendre solidement rouge dans les années à venir.

«Il n'y avait aucune base factuelle pour mériter la désignation (de terrorisme) dont le public est au courant», a déclaré Ricardo Herrero, directeur exécutif du Cuba Study Group. «Il a été conçu pour paralyser l'administration Biden et préparer le terrain pour les prochaines élections en Floride.»

Les observateurs cubains en contact avec l'administration Biden disent qu'on leur a dit que la politique cubaine était en cours de révision, mais que d'autres questions étaient tout simplement plus importantes pour le moment. Attendez trop longtemps pour prendre des mesures importantes liées à Cuba, cependant, et l'équipe de Biden se lancera dans la saison électorale pour les mi-mandat 2022, les républicains désireux de peindre le président et les autres démocrates comme étant doux envers le communisme et le socialisme.

«Je ne sais pas quand ils vont passer un bon moment à Cuba», a déclaré John Kavulich, président du Conseil économique et commercial non partisan entre les États-Unis et Cuba, à propos de Biden et de ses collaborateurs. «Je ne pense pas qu'ils le sachent, et je pense que personne ne le sait. Et quiconque dit savoir ne le sait pas.

Radacao

Teresina, Piaui, Brazil

19 April 2021

Raúl Castro sai, e Miguel Díaz-Canel vai liderar o Partido Comunista em Cuba

Por [Redação](#)



O presidente cubano, Miguel Díaz-Canel, 60, foi eleito hoje o primeiro-secretário do Partido Comunista de Cuba (PCC), substituindo Raúl Castro, que se aposentou aos 89 anos, anunciou o partido, único na ilha.

“Eleito Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermudez, Primeiro-Secretário do Comitê Central do Partido Comunista de #Cuba no #8ºCongressoPCC”, anunciou o partido em sua conta no Twitter ao final da eleição dos delegados do partido.

Em seu último dia à frente do Partido Comunista de Cuba, Raúl Castro, de 89 anos, entrega o poder a uma nova geração de dirigentes, em um momento histórico após 62 anos dos irmãos Castro no comando do país. Aos 60 anos, Díaz-Canel o cargo máximo de Cuba, uma das cinco nações comunistas do mundo, ao lado de China, Vietnã, Laos e Coreia do Norte.

“Entregamos a liderança do país a um grupo de dirigentes preparados, endurecidos por décadas de experiência” na organização e “comprometidos com a ética e os princípios da revolução e do socialismo”, disse Castro na sexta-feira (16), durante a abertura do VIII Congresso do Partido Comunista de Cuba.

A transferência ocorre em meio a uma profunda crise econômica no país devido à pandemia do coronavírus e ao fortalecimento do embargo que os Estados Unidos mantêm ao país há 60 anos. Embora seja uma

transição simbólica, em um país onde a maioria só conheceu Fidel e Raúl Castro à frente do poder, não significa necessariamente uma mudança na linha política cubana.

“Desde que nasci, conheci apenas um partido e até agora vivemos com ele, e ninguém passa fome”, diz Miguel Gainza, um artesão de 58 anos que trabalha na Havana Velha e apoia esse sistema político. “É uma pena que Fidel tenha morrido porque ele resolvia tudo”, lamenta. “Administrar um país”

Um total de 300 delegados de toda a ilha, representando 700.000 militantes, votaram direta e secretamente no domingo para eleger o Comitê Central, composto de 114 membros. O novo comitê vai anunciar hoje a formação do Birô Político, atualmente com 17 membros, e a direção do partido.

Para John Kavulich, presidente do Conselho Econômico e Comercial Cuba-Estados Unidos, é necessária uma mudança geracional. “Atualmente, a idade combinada dos três líderes atuais do Partido Comunista está se aproximando dos 300 anos”, diz.

A saída de Castro pode ser acompanhada pela aposentadoria de outros militantes que alcançaram o triunfo da revolução em 1959, incluindo o segundo secretário, José Ramón Machado Ventura, de 90 anos, e Ramiro Valdés, 88. O partido está envelhecendo. De seus integrantes, 42,6% têm mais de 55 anos, o que frustra as aspirações dos jovens.

Kavulich considera que há no partido uma “falta de vontade de aceitar que já não é preciso lutar por uma revolução, mas sim gerir um país não de meados do século XX, mas da segunda década do século XXI”. Entre muitos cubanos há um cansaço devido à escassez e às longas filas para se abastecer. O país importa 80% do que consome.

O governo, atormentado nos últimos quatro anos pelo endurecimento das sanções de Washington, continua tendo o combate ideológico entre suas prioridades.

“A existência de um único partido em Cuba foi e sempre estará no foco das campanhas do inimigo”, disse Castro em seu discurso.

“Esta unidade deve ser protegida com zelo e nunca aceitar a divisão entre revolucionários sob falsos pretextos de maior democracia”, acrescentou.

A nova liderança chega em meio a uma expansão das demandas sociais nas redes, graças ao advento da internet móvel em 2018. Ativistas, artistas e intelectuais mantêm uma intensa atividade nas redes sociais, em um país onde as manifestações são quase inexistentes.

Antes de partir, Castro rejeitou que “as mentiras, a manipulação e a divulgação de notícias falsas não tenham mais limites” em referência às críticas nas redes.

É “a contrarrevolução interna, que carece de base social, liderança e capacidade de mobilização”, acrescentou.

Durante o congresso, o partido adotou uma resolução para enfrentar a “subversão” política e ideológica, enquanto vários ativistas, jornalistas independentes e artistas denunciaram no Twitter que a polícia os impedia de sair de casa, recurso utilizado para impedir que se encontrassem.

La Nacion

San Jose, Costa Rica

19 April 2021

Política

Presidente Miguel Díaz-Canel es el nuevo líder del Partido Comunista de Cuba luego de salida de Raúl Castro

Relevo de mando no representa un cambio en la línea política del país

AFP



Raúl Castro levanta la mano del presidente cubano Miguel Díaz-Canel, quien fue elegido nuevo primer secretario durante el VIII Congreso del Partido Comunista de Cuba, en el Palacio de Convenciones de La Habana, el 19 de abril del 2021. Foto: AFP

La Habana. Cuba dio vuelta a la página de gobiernos de los hermanos Castro, con el retiro este lunes de Raúl Castro, a los 89 años, una transición simbólica, pero que no cambia la línea política del país, uno de los últimos comunistas en el mundo.

“Electo Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez, Primer Secretario del Comité Central del Partido Comunista de #Cuba en el #8voCongresoPCC”, anunció el partido en su cuenta de Twitter al término de la elección de los delegados de esta organización política.

“19 de Abril, día histórico”, dijo de su lado en su cuenta de Twitter el presidente Díaz-Canel, de 60 años. “La Generación del Centenario, fundadora y guía del Partido, traspasa responsabilidades” a una generación más joven, añadió.

19 de Abril, día histórico en que culmina el histórico #8voCongresoPCC. La Generación del Centenario, fundadora y guía del Partido, traspasa responsabilidades. #SomosCuba #SomosContinuidad pic.twitter.com/EKSBxjL99a— Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez (@DiazCanelB) April 19, 2021

El cónclave del partido único que se realizó en La Habana y fue denominado “Congreso de la continuidad” concluyó este lunes en Bahía de Cochinos, donde hace 60 años Cuba derrotó una invasión anticastrista organizada y financiada por la CIA.

El relevo se da en medio de una profunda crisis económica en el país por la pandemia del coronavirus y el reforzamiento del embargo que mantiene Estados Unidos contra el país desde hace 60 años. La mayoría de los 11,2 millones de habitantes del país sólo ha conocido a Fidel y Raúl Castro al frente del poder. “Yo desde que nací conozco un solo partido y hasta ahora se vive con él, y nadie se muere de hambre”, dice Miguel Gainza, un artesano de 58 años, que trabaja en La Habana Vieja y apoya este sistema político.

Un total de 300 delegados provenientes de toda la isla, en representación de 700.000 militantes, votaron el domingo para elegir al Comité Central, integrado por 114 miembros.

El Buró Político, la cúpula del partido, quedó integrado por 14 miembros, informó el partido comunista este lunes.

Para John Kavulich, presidente del Consejo Económico y Comercial Cuba-Estados Unidos, es necesario un relevo generacional.

La salida de Castro está acompañada de la jubilación de otros militantes que lograron el triunfo de la revolución en 1959 como el segundo secretario, José Ramón Machado Ventura, de 90 años, y Ramiro Valdés, de 88 años.

El partido está envejecido. El 42,6% de sus militantes tiene más de 55 años, lo que frustra las aspiraciones de los jóvenes.

Kavulich considera que en el partido hay una “falta de voluntad para aceptar que ya no necesita luchar por una revolución, sino administrar un país”.

Entre muchos cubanos hay un cansancio por la escasez y las largas filas para abastecerse. El país importa el 80% de lo que consume.

El gobierno, acosado en los últimos cuatro años por el endurecimiento de sanciones desde Washington, continúa teniendo entre sus prioridades el combate ideológico.

“La existencia en Cuba de un único partido ha estado y estará siempre en el foco de las campañas del enemigo”, afirmó Castro el viernes en su discurso en el congreso del partido. “Esta unidad debe cuidarse con celo y jamás aceptar la división entre revolucionarios bajo falsos pretextos de mayor democracia”, añadió.

En la pizzería en la que trabaja con rap de fondo, Luis Enrique Oramas, de 30 años, dice que “si dejaran a las personas opinar lo que piensan, sería como en otros lugares, (habría) dos y hasta tres partidos”.

La nueva dirigencia llega en medio de una expansión de demandas sociales en redes, gracias a la llegada del Internet móvil en el 2018. Activistas, artistas e intelectuales mantienen una intensa actividad en redes, en un país donde las manifestaciones son casi inexistentes.

Mientras se celebraba el congreso del PCC, una veintena de activistas, periodistas independientes y artistas denunciaron que la Policía les impedía salir de sus casas, un recurso empleado para evitar que se reúnan, según un tuit publicado el sábado por el contestatario Movimiento San Isidro.

También denunciaron que fueron incomunicados con el corte de Internet en sus domicilios.

“¿A que le temen los asistentes al #8voCongresoPCC? A que les arruinen la fiesta de simulaciones. Mientras se dan palmadas en la espalda por mantener su régimen autoritario, someten a activistas y periodistas al acoso y a la prisión en sus hogares”, dijo en Twitter Erika Guevara-Rosas, directora para las Américas de Amnistía Internacional.

Antes de irse, Castro rechazó que “la mentira, la manipulación y la propagación de noticias falsas ya no conocen límite alguno” en referencia a las críticas en las redes. Se trata de “la contrarrevolución interna, que carece de base social, liderazgo y capacidad movilizativa”, añadió. Durante el congreso, el partido adoptó una resolución para enfrentar la “subversión” política e ideológica.

Bloomberg News

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economics

As Castro Reign Ends, Cuba Is Mired in a Debt Debacle Once Again

By Ezra Fieser

Hopes for U.S. rapprochement fade as Biden focuses elsewhere
Economy has suffered after Covid sapped revenue from tourism



A private taxi driver wears a protective face mask while driving tourists around Havana. Photographer: Yamil Lage/AFP via Getty Images

For a brief moment, Cuba appeared poised to return to international capital markets. It was late in the Obama era, months after the historic U.S.-Cuba rapprochement. And Raul Castro vowed to clear the debt the country had defaulted on decades earlier, a first step toward re-entering the world of global finance and securing the funding needed to revive a moribund economy.

Six years after it restored diplomatic relations with the U.S., Cuba's efforts at making peace with creditors have been derailed, and the island is as isolated as ever. The market for its old commercial loans is all but dead, and when they do trade it's for just 10 cents on the dollar. That's down about 70% from when optimism peaked in 2016. The dour mood took hold as foreign support dried up over the past few years when the economy of former patron Venezuela fell apart.

The relationship with the U.S. went cold under President Donald Trump, and Joe Biden has signaled a reconciliation isn't a priority amid efforts to staunch the pandemic and push through his infrastructure spending plan. A sharp drop in tourism sparked by Covid-19 robbed the nation of foreign currency, exacerbating the pain caused by a decline in exports, which have fallen by a third since 2014. With hardly enough cash to pay for food imports now as Raul Castro gives up his last vestiges of power -- bringing an end to six decades of Castro family rule -- Cuba can't make good on the debt repayment deals that had been hailed as a sign of its return to the international stage just a few years earlier.

"The combination of Cuba reducing the pace of reforms, the impact of the Venezuela situation and the U.S. sanctions is all being reflected in a balance of payment crisis," said Pavel Vidal, a former Cuban central bank analyst who now teaches at the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in Cali, Colombia. "That's forced them to stop servicing foreign debt." It's a letdown for investors who had been encouraged when Raul took over from his brother Fidel in 2011 and made progress at settling old debts from the government and state-owned companies, some of which dated to the 1970s.

His government reached a deal with 14 members of the Paris Club of wealthy governments in 2015 under which \$8.5 billion was forgiven, leaving \$2.6 billion in arrears. Cuba was given 18 years to pay off the debt. Russia, its Cold War-era benefactor, had already forgiven 90% of its debt. There was a pickup in trading of the old commercial loans, with prices as high as 36 cents on the dollar in 2016 as investors saw a chance to profit from the Caribbean island's return to the world stage. The financial world got another encouraging sign in late 2017 when Raul Castro pledged Cuba's "willingness to fulfill its commitments" to creditors.

London Club

A group of investment firms known as the London Club holding about \$1.4 billion of defaulted private debt reached out, offering the government a settlement. But by that time, the Trump administration was trying to squeeze Cuba and discourage any efforts at normalizing relations. Nothing came of the London Club's overture. Investors eventually brought acclaim to a London court, where the case is ongoing. Cuba owed \$17.8 billion in foreign debt as of 2017, according to the most recently published government statistics, though the total has almost surely risen since then.

Even if it could start to service the debt, the country faces other obstacles, including U.S. sanctions and questions over how to compensate for land and businesses it expropriated during the revolution. U.S. politics may be another obstacle to friendlier relations with avowed communists, with the Biden administration looking to swat down suggestions it leans far left. The Cuban Foreign Ministry didn't respond to a request seeking comment. The Paris Club declined to comment.

U.S. policy under Biden will be governed by "support for democracy and human rights," White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said April 16. "A Cuba policy shift or additional steps is currently not among the president's top foreign policy priorities."

Covid Vaccine

So there's no doubt the prospect of Cuba selling an overseas bond remains a long way away. Exports last year fell to their lowest level in 15 years, leaving the country with little hard currency to pay for imports of basic necessities. The economy shrank 11% last year, among the worst contractions in Latin America.

There's some hope, though, that Cuba's dire straits could provide the motivation for its new political leaders to bolster their efforts to clear up the defaulted debt issue and attract foreign capital.

Miguel Diaz-Canel, who has been at the forefront of pushing for economic reforms after taking over as president from Raul Castro in 2018, was named the new leader of the all-powerful Communist Party on Monday, cementing his influence. Diaz-Canel has a track record of overseeing reforms, having helmed the painful process of unifying a decades-old dual currency system, which he said would allow the country "to go ahead with the transformations that we need to update our economic and social model."

And there's a chance that Cuba could see economic benefits from developing a Covid-19 vaccine. Health agencies are conducting Phase III trials with two candidates, with plans to inoculate nearly 2 million adults by the end of May. If the vaccines are successful, the island could reopen to tourism and potentially export the shots. "The situation right now could be the tipping point that will lead to more reforms," said Vidal, the former Cuban central bank analyst. "They have to put their finances in order so they can attract international investment, because that's what's needed."

For now, though, the landscape for investors remains bleak. Cuba missed its agreed-upon payments to the members of the Paris Club in 2019. Last year, as Cuba's economic slide worsened during the pandemic, the two sides agreed to suspend payments for the year. There aren't currently any negotiations between the parties, according to a person who has been involved in the talks and asked not to be identified citing private information.

"Both sides know that the Cubans can't pay anything," said John Kavulich, the president of the U.S.-Cuba Trade and Economic Council, a New York-based researcher focused on the countries' relationship.

The Guardian

London, United Kingdom

19 April 2021

Skepticism and a shrug: Cubans greet the end of 62 years of Castro rule
People in Havana more concerned about buying chicken suspect little will change with Raúl's departure



People carry groceries home in Havana. 'I don't think there'll be significant changes,' said one man. Photograph: Yamil Lage/AFP/Getty Images

By Ruaridh Nicoll in Havana

News travels swiftly through Havana, bumping against people so they turn, then rolling on. Cubans have a phrase for it: la bola en la calle, the ball in the street.

Raúl Castro's announcement on Friday that he is to retire and bring 62 years of Castro rule on the island to a close caused barely a ripple, even if it sent waves around the world.

Cubans were expecting it, and for those battling to buy food in what are increasingly tough times, there was skepticism about what difference it would make.

"I don't think there will be any significant changes in the near future," said one man. "Not as long as the old guard casts its shadow and influence on Cuban politics."



He was instead following news that chicken had been spotted at a shop on Linea avenue, one that accepted Cuban pesos rather than US dollars. A vast queue had formed, swelling and writhing at its centre as tempers flared. The police arrived to keep the peace.

In his speech to the eighth congress of the Cuban Communist party (PCC), Castro told delegates he was stepping down with the satisfaction of having fulfilled his duty and “with confidence in the future of the country”.



Raúl Castro announces his retirement. Photograph: Ariel Ley Royero/ACN/AFP/Getty Images Even if the population was distracted, the speech was intriguing. It distilled what we know about a man who for decades was a shadow next to his flamboyant brother.

It showed how far he had travelled from Marxist-Leninism in the 1960s toward market solutions, so long as the one-party rule he sees as a bulwark against US exploitation remains unthreatened.

Since he took over from Fidel as president in 2008, and then as the more powerful first secretary of the party in 2011, he has introduced important economic reforms. Small-scale private businesses appeared, the buying and selling of houses and cars was allowed, and then came the arrival of mobile internet.

On Friday he said: “We have to eliminate the tired illusion ... that Cuba is the only country where you can live without working.” He told the state media not to obscure the country’s problems with “triumphalism and superficiality”. He returned to his call for a new generation of leaders to emerge.

When the two brothers emerged from the Sierra Maestra mountains in 1959 with a surprising number of those still in positions of power, they were at the forefront of the battle for gender and racial equality. Many Cubans, however, believe those early gains have long been given up. Pockets of dissent have started appearing in poorer barrios.



Fidel and Raúl Castro (left and centre) with Che Guevara in 1961. Photograph: Salas Archive Photos / Alamy Sto/Alamy Stock Photo

Castro acknowledged the problem. The party released figures to show it reflected the make-up of society, but he said the promotion of women and people of colour was “still insufficient in terms of the top offices in the party, state and government”.

Change does not come easily, though. It’s all but certain that Castro will be replaced as the party’s supremely powerful first secretary by Miguel Díaz Canel, the 60-year-old, white male president.

Rune-readers now look to a new second secretary for a shift. “There is one person who would send a message,” said William LeoGrande of the American University in Washington. “The [Afro-Cuban] first secretary of the party in Havana, Lázara López-Acea. People speak really highly of her.”

For Cubans, the priority remains food. Donald Trump derailed Castro’s most significant achievement, the 2016 detente with the Obama administration.

Trump's administration retightened sanctions, making financial transactions on the island all but impossible. Relatives lost their ability to wire money to Cuba through Western Union. Cruises were banned, tourism discouraged.

A rally against "the US blockade" took place in Havana recently, a long, loud trail of bikes and cars flying Cuban flags passing the US embassy on the Malecon corniche.

Even hard-nosed business people have been surprised at Joe Biden's refusal to reverse Trump's course. "He hasn't even made the changes that were telegraphed," said John Kavulich, the president of US Cuba Trade and Economic Council. "Removing the cap on US remittances wouldn't even require an interaction with the Cuban government."



Covid destroyed what was left of the economy, despite Cuba's initial success in keeping it out and a remarkable move to create its own vaccines. By the government's own measure the economy shrunk by 11% in 2020, causing imports to fall by 40%.

Díaz-Canel shows no signs of veering from intransigence. He cleaves to #SomosContinuidad – we are continuity – as a Twitter hashtag. The slogan of the Congress is "Continuity and Unity". Ada Ferrer, the author of the forthcoming Cuba: An American History, says: "Continuity in what? Scarcity?"

Marta Deus is the 33-year-old founder of Mandao, a sort of Cuban Deliveroo. It is the business success story of lockdown, keeping many of Havana's restaurants – not to say residents – alive.

"Running a business here is super, super complicated," she said. "Some ministers and vice-ministers want to change things, but the bureaucracy is still super hard. In my experience, nothing much has changed."

Outside the shop on Linea the queue has gone, along with any memory of chicken. All that remains are endless shelves of filtered water.

News also travels swiftly through Havana by WhatsApp in the form of brutal memes, and one comes to mind. Why do Cuban shops now resemble the human body? Because they're 70% water.

Miami Herald

Miami, Florida

19 April 2021

Miguel Díaz-Canel is named Cuba's next Communist Party chief, replacing Raúl Castro

By David Ovalle and Mario Pentón

For the first time in over six decades there will no longer be a Castro brother at the helm of Cuba's government. Raúl Castro is stepping down as first secretary of the Communist Party, the island's most powerful political post. His departure comes in the middle of the worst economic crisis in decades and mounting social tension.

Miguel Díaz-Canel, the loyalist groomed to succeed Raúl Castro, on Monday was formally named chief of Cuba's Communist Party, giving him consolidated control of a nation grappling with a shattered economy, food shortages and a citizenry increasingly emboldened to criticize the government.

The long-expected promotion came after Castro, the former president and revolutionary figure who helped his brother cement a communist regime in Cuba, officially announced his retirement at age 89. Castro himself made the announcement on the last day of the Communist Party's congress, a carefully scripted event in Havana meant to herald the arrival of a new generation of leaders as the last of the old guard rebels depart amid the island's worst economic crisis in decades.

Delegates rose from their seats and applauded as Díaz-Canel approached the stage, embraced Castro and launched into a speech in which he said the Cuban revolution "is alive and well in the midst of the gale that is shaking the world." Díaz-Canel wore a black suit, while Raúl Castro donned his usual olive-green military uniform. The new party chief vowed to consult his predecessor on "strategic decisions for the future of the nation."

"The army general will always be present because he is a reference for any Cuban communist," Díaz-Canel said in an excerpt of the speech broadcast on Cuban state television. Throughout the congress, the 60-year-old Díaz-Canel — who was born after the revolution that ushered Fidel Castro into power — has pushed a theme of "continuity." While Cuba is in urgent need of an economic jump start, few anticipate that his leadership will mark a significant departure from how the government operates, especially as he looks to consolidate the support of party loyalists.

"It's been embedded in Cuba's DNA — all the habits, the totalitarian populism, the allergy to criticism, the repression of independent thought," said Ted Henken, a Cuban expert at Baruch College in New York. "These habits will die very hard, whether it's Díaz-Canel or somebody else."

In his departing remarks, Raúl Castro also announced the new leaders of the Politburo, the powerful group of senior leaders in the Communist Party, whose ranks will now include just one of the "historic generation" — Álvaro López, 77, who fought alongside Fidel Castro's rebels and was recently named head of the armed forces. Also in the Politburo is Cuban General Luis Alberto Rodríguez López-Calleja, who manages a military conglomerate of the island's state-owned businesses.

López-Calleja is Castro's former son-in-law, and the two are believed to remain close. The military and its entrepreneurial offshoot, known by its Spanish-language acronym of GAESA, control as much as 80% of the Cuban economy, including vital sectors such as hotels and tourism, mining and state stores.

Cuba's leaders are under increasing pressure to improve the lives of the island's 11 million citizens. The nation's economy contracted 11% in 2020, according to government figures, as the pandemic halted tourism and then-President Donald Trump instituted a series of punishing economic sanctions designed to squeeze the Cuban government. Cuban citizens, as they have during previous hard times, are again forced to wait in long lines for goods. Remittances from the United States have dwindled under Trump sanctions, and U.S. President Joe Biden has yet to undo any of the restrictions.

This year, Cuba unified its dual currency system, a measure meant to make the economy easier to navigate for much-needed foreign investors. While some state salaries were increased, the prices of goods have nevertheless skyrocketed. The government also announced an expansion of some small private businesses, a list that includes software programming, small-scale veterinarians and music teachers — but doesn't allow journalists, healthcare practitioners or architects.

Shortly before the congress, Cuba announced it was loosening long-standing restrictions on the sale of beef and dairy, and the slaughter of cows, allowing farmers to "do as they wish" with livestock as long as state quotas are met. The announcement was made as the island is dealing with acute food shortages.

Díaz-Canel's rise through the communist ranks has been years in the making. Widely considered a loyal bureaucrat, Díaz-Canel made his name as the party chief in two provinces before he was named vice president of the country in 2013. That's when Raúl Castro announced that he would vacate the presidency in 2018, handing over the presidency to Díaz-Canel, while retaining the more powerful role of party first secretary.

Though Díaz-Canel promised throughout the congress to uphold the core tenets of Cuba's state-run, Soviet-style system, analysts say the island's dismal economy will force him to make difficult decisions to enhance production, investment and efficiency.

“He is by necessity going to be focusing on what is unpleasant,” John Kavulich, the president of the U.S.-Cuba Trade and Economic Council, said of Díaz-Canel. “I believe he very well may be a one-term president, not because he's forced out, but because he will have completed those transition tasks.”

The new party leader also faces simmering social tension, as a nascent civil society demands greater freedoms and ordinary Cubans begin to express their frustration online. Social media emerged as a recurring theme at the congress, with Díaz-Canel saying negative messages on the internet are part of an “extreme right” campaign to destroy the revolution. He likened communist enemies to “mercenary lumpen” — parroting a phrase often used by Fidel Castro to describe Cubans who left the island in opposition.

Miami economist Emilio Morales pointed out that the appointment last week of López, the new leader of the nation's armed forces, is a sign that old-guard party leadership will still have at least some role. He replaced Leopoldo Cintra, 79, another rebel who rose through the ranks of the military. Though there is no longer a Castro in charge, there are also still other family members in influential positions.

“The real power is not Díaz-Canel. The real power is Raul's family and Lopez-Calleja,” said Morales, president of the Havana Consulting Group, a Miami-based firm that analyzes the Cuban economy.

Christopher Sabatini, an expert in Latin American affairs and senior fellow at the Chatham House think tank, noted that the transition comes at a crucial time, when critical voices such as artists belonging to an activist collective known as the San Isidro movement find a wider platform. But he doesn't expect much from the decidedly uncharismatic Díaz-Canel. “He's a classic company man,” Sabatini said. “I don't think he has the ideas and the political capital to implement anything dramatic.” Many Cubans on the island are equally skeptical.

Manuel Almaguer, a 34-year-old who raises livestock in the eastern Cuban province of Holguín, said he was wistful that Raúl Castro left behind a country “resentful, impoverished, and totally dependent on the state.” He believes key generals will have to leave for Díaz-Canel to have any sway. “Díaz-Canel will continue to be a puppet of the centennial generation,” Almaguer said. “For Díaz-Canel to be seen, it will take at least five years. Time and natural law will take enemies out of the way.”

AFP

Paris, France

19 April 2021

Raúl Castro se va, pero Cuba seguirá la misma línea política



Fotografía divulgada por la Agencia Cubana de Noticias (ACN) mostrando al primer secretario de Partido Comunista de Cuba, Raúl Castro, en la tercera sesión del octavo congreso del Partido Comunista en el Palacio de las Convenciones, en La Habana, el 18 de abril de 2021. [afp_tickers](#)
Este contenido fue publicado el 19 abril 2021 - 11:27 19 abril 2021 - 11:27 (AFP)

En su último día a la cabeza del Partido Comunista de Cuba, Raúl Castro, de 89 años, entrega el poder a una nueva generación de dirigentes, en un momento histórico tras 62 años de los hermanos Castro al frente del país, pero sin ningún cambio en la línea política.

"Entregamos la dirección del país a un grupo de dirigentes preparados, curtidos por décadas de experiencia" en la organización y "comprometidos con la ética y los principios de la revolución y el socialismo", dijo Castro el viernes, durante la apertura del octavo Congreso del Partido Comunista de Cuba (PCC).

El presidente, Miguel Díaz-Canel, de 60 años, deberá tomar este lunes el relevo como primer secretario del PCC, el máximo cargo en Cuba, una de las cinco naciones comunistas en el mundo, junto con China, Vietnam, Laos y Corea del Norte. El relevo se da en medio de una profunda crisis económica en el país por la pandemia del coronavirus y el reforzamiento del embargo que mantiene Estados Unidos contra el país desde hace 60 años.

Aunque es una transición simbólica, en un país donde la mayoría sólo ha conocido a Fidel y Raúl Castro al frente del poder, no necesariamente supone un cambio en la línea política de Cuba.

"Yo desde que nací conozco un solo partido y hasta ahora se vive con él, y nadie se muere de hambre", dice Miguel Gainza, un artesano de 58 años, que trabaja en La Habana Vieja y apoya este sistema político. "Lástima que Fidel se haya muerto porque él sí resolvía todo", lamenta.

- "Administrar un país" -

Un total de 300 delegados provenientes de toda la isla, en representación de 700.000 militantes, votaron el domingo de manera directa y secreta para elegir al Comité Central, integrado por 114 miembros.

El nuevo comité anunciará este lunes la conformación del Buró Político, actualmente de 17 integrantes, y la cúpula del partido.

Para John Kavulich, presidente del Consejo Económico y Comercial Cuba-Estados Unidos, es necesario un relevo generacional. "En la actualidad, la edad sumada de los tres líderes actuales del Partido Comunista se acerca a 300 años", dice.

La salida de Castro podría estar acompañada de la jubilación de otros militantes que lograron el triunfo de la revolución en 1959, incluido el segundo secretario, José Ramón Machado Ventura, de 90 años, y Ramiro Valdés, de 88 años.

El partido está envejecido. El 42,6% de sus militantes tiene más de 55 años, lo que frustra las aspiraciones de los jóvenes.

Kavulich considera que en el partido hay una "falta de voluntad para aceptar que ya no necesita luchar por una revolución, sino administrar un país no de mediados del siglo XX, sino de la segunda década del siglo XXI".

Entre muchos cubanos hay un cansancio por la escasez y las largas filas para abastecerse. El país importa el 80% de lo que consume.

El gobierno, acosado en los últimos cuatro años por el endurecimiento de sanciones desde Washington, continúa teniendo entre sus prioridades el combate ideológico.

"La existencia en Cuba de un único partido ha estado y estará siempre en el foco de las campañas del enemigo", dijo Castro en su discurso.

"Esta unidad debe cuidarse con celo y jamás aceptar la división entre revolucionarios bajo falsos pretextos de mayor democracia", añadió.

- "Contrarrevolución interna" -

En la pizzería en la que trabaja con música de rap de fondo, Luis Enrique Oramas, de 30 años, dice que "si dejaran a las personas opinar lo que piensan, sería como en otros lugares, (habría) dos y hasta tres partidos". "A la mayoría de las personas nos gustaría más que como se está moviendo el país ahora mismo, teniendo un partido en el que todos piensan lo mismo", añade.

La nueva dirigencia llega en medio de una expansión de demandas sociales en redes, gracias a la llegada del internet móvil en 2018.

Activistas, artistas e intelectuales mantienen una intensa actividad en redes, en un país donde las manifestaciones son casi inexistentes.

Antes de irse, Castro rechazó que "la mentira, la manipulación y la propagación de noticias falsas ya no conocen límite alguno" en referencia a las críticas en las redes.

Se trata de "la contrarrevolución interna, que carece de base social, liderazgo y capacidad movilizativa", añadió.

Durante el congreso, el partido adoptó una resolución para enfrentar la "subversión" política e ideológica. Mientras se celebraba el congreso del PCC, una veintena de activistas, periodistas independientes y artistas denunciaron en Twitter que la policía les impedía salir de sus casas, un recurso empleado para evitar que se reúnan.

AFP

Paris, France

17 April 2021

Partido Comunista de Cuba elige su cúpula el domingo y la anunciará el lunes



Fotografía divulgada por la Agencia Cubana de Noticias (ACN), de una vista general de una sesión del octavo Congreso del Partido Comunista de Cuba en el Palacio de las Convenciones, el 17 de abril de 2021. Ariel LEY ROYERO ACN/AFP

La Habana (AFP)

El Partido Comunista de Cuba (PCC, único) informó que este domingo elige al Comité Central, su órgano de dirección, cuyos resultados de votación se darán a conocer el lunes, al cierre de un histórico congreso que marca la salida de Raúl Castro.

Los delegados "conocerán y debatirán la candidatura a miembros del Comité Central para posteriormente proceder al ejercicio de votación, cuyos resultados se darán a conocer" el lunes, indicó el partido en su página de internet.

Luego de la elección, el Comité Central celebrará su primer pleno que elegirá a la máxima dirección del PCC para el período 2021-2026.

Elegido mediante voto directo y secreto por los 300 delegados de todo el país que participan en el cónclave, en representación de 700.000 militantes, el Comité Central, que tiene 114 miembros, es el encargado de designar al Buró Político, de 17 integrantes, la cúpula del partido.

Seguidamente el Buró Político seleccionará al primer y segundo secretario de la organización, cargos que ostentan actualmente Raúl Castro, de 89 años, y José Ramón Machado Ventura, de 90 años.

La salida de Castro marca también la jubilación de otros miembros de la "vieja guardia" del Partido, como se conoce en la isla a los combatientes que hicieron la revolución de 1959, incluido el "comandante de la revolución" Ramiro Valdés, de 88 años.

Castro entregará la estafeta a una nueva generación encabezada por el presidente Miguel Díaz-Canel, de 60 años.

En la presidencia del país desde 2018, Díaz-Canel tomará así las riendas del poder absoluto del país, como en su día lo tuvieron Fidel, fallecido en 2016, y Raúl, y se convertiría además en el primer civil que dirigirá el partido, en el que ha desarrollado toda su carrera.

"Lo importante será quién instale el Partido Comunista de Cuba como segundo secretario y en otros puestos de liderazgo: edad, género, raza", comentó a la AFP el presidente del Consejo Económico y Comercial Cuba-Estados Unidos, John Kavulich.

"En la actualidad, la edad combinada de los tres líderes actuales del Partido Comunista se acerca a 300 años", añade Kavulich en tono de broma.

El relevo del liderazgo histórico en el Partido, aunque muy simbólico en un país donde la inmensa mayoría de los habitantes sólo ha conocido la dirigencia de los hermanos Fidel y Raúl Castro, no supone un cambio en la línea política de la isla, uno de los cinco últimos países comunistas del mundo.

EFE

Madrid, Spain

16 April 2021

Retirada de Raúl Castro es un mero "traspaso burocrático", dicen expertos

Emilio J. López

Miami, 16 abr (EFE).- La previsible despedida política de Raúl Castro, cerca de cumplir 90 años, como primer secretario del gobernante Partido Comunista de Cuba supone un "cambio fraude", un mero "traspaso burocrático del poder", no una transición política real, resaltaron este viernes expertos y opositores.

Se prevé que el hermano de Fidel Castro anuncie que cede el testigo durante el VIII Congreso del Partido Comunista de Cuba (PCC), que comenzó este viernes, pero los analistas y disidentes en el exilio aseguran que él, su familia y el entorno militar seguirán representando el poder en la isla.

"No es una transición política, es un traspaso burocrático del poder a una figura (Miguel Díaz-Canel, actual presidente del país) que seguirá recibiendo órdenes de la cúpula mafiosa militar que controla" la nación, dijo hoy a Efe Emilio Morales, presidente de Havana Consulting Group.

TODOS LOS RESORTES DEL PODER EN MANOS DE LOS CASTRO

Para Morales, lo peculiar de este traspaso de poder es que Raúl Castro ha depositado todos los resortes de control en manos de su propia familia.

Así, precisó el economista, quien controla la finanzas del país es el exyerno de Castro, el general Luis Alberto López-Callejas, junto con su hermano Guillermo Faustino Rodríguez López-Callejas. "Ambos controlan GAE S.A. y todas sus estructuras empresariales dentro y fuera del país y en paraísos fiscales", afirmó el presidente de la citada firma de asesoría.

O su nieto, Raúl Guillermo Rodríguez Castro, quien, además de hijo de Luis Alberto López-Callejas, es el jefe del Departamento de Seguridad Personal, encargado de proteger a Castro y "vigilar al resto de los dirigentes del país", añadió.

En materia económico-social, el traspaso de poder no va a significar "ningún cambio importante": todo quedará en el mismo "statu quo", sin "cambios estructurales profundos en la economía" y regido por el "sistema de economía centralizada", subrayó.

De la misma opinión es la opositora Rosa María Payá, quien opina que todo lo relativo al VIII Congreso del PCC es un "gran esfuerzo de propaganda" para presentar como un momento de cambio lo que no es más que un "cambio fraude".

Payá, hija del desaparecido líder opositor Oswaldo Payá, opina que el Congreso, al igual que la "retirada" de Raúl Castro, que ocupa el cargo de líder del PCC desde que en 2011 sucedió en él a Fidel, no es más que una "puesta en escena diseñada para el consumo internacional".

Una mera representación para, acotó la opositora cubana, "poner de manera exclusivamente nominal un rostro civil a la dictadura" e intentar lograr "concesiones económicas de Washington y Europa".

Pero "el pueblo cubano continúa siendo el gran excluido", aseveró a Efe.

Payá, promotora del movimiento Cuba Decide, coincide con Morales en que el poder se mantendrá en manos de la familia Castro y el "pequeñísimo grupo de jefes dueños del conglomerado militar y cuerpos de inteligencia".

"Cuando el régimen cubano se someta a la voluntad soberana del pueblo", entonces se podrá hablar de un cambio democrático en Cuba, agregó.

Por eso, prosiguió, es tan importante "la protesta que se ha extendido por todo Cuba horas antes del Congreso".

El hecho de que, por primera vez en 61 años, los Castro dejarán de figurar en la primera línea de la política, tampoco es un factor relevante para John Kavulich, presidente de la entidad privada Consejo Comercial y Económico Cubano-Estadounidense.

UN PARTIDO COMUNISTA CUBANO ANACRÓNICO

No lo es con un gobernante Partido Comunista devenido en un "anacronismo", experimentando un largo proceso de "decadencia", sin voluntad para reconocer que "ya no necesita luchar por una revolución sino gestionar un país", dijo Kavulich a Efe.

Y comparó al PCC cubano con el de otras naciones como China y Vietnam, capaces de "adoptar el papel requerido para que sus países y ciudadanos prosperen", a diferencia de Cuba.

Cuba "solo luce hoy por su adhesión a la mediocridad", sostenida comercial y económicamente por otros países, con 11,3 millones de ciudadanos que "no necesitan ninguna adherencia ideológica" y convertido en un país "comercialmente inhóspito" para la inversión extranjera.

Orlando Gutiérrez, director del Directorio Democrático Cubano, afirmó a Efe que el VIII Congreso del Partido Comunista de Cuba es un "embuste al pueblo de Cuba", una "mera reorganización interna para perpetuar su ocupación ilegítima y criminal del poder público".

A juicio de Morales, lo que sí se puede prever es un "aumento considerable de la represión y las libertades ciudadanas, además un deterioro aún mayor de la economía, atrapada en la ineficiencia del modelo y el efecto directo de la pandemia".

"Una situación que ha puesto al país al borde de la hambruna", alertó el experto. EFE

16 April 2021

Politics

Raul Castro to Stand Down as Head of Cuba's Communist Party

By Jim Wyss

Fidel's brother will hand reins of the Cuban communist party
Historic hand-off comes amid economic crisis, rising tensions



Raul Castro Photographer: Pool/Getty Images South America

Cuba's Communist Party Congress that kicked off Friday made it official: Raul Castro, late leader Fidel Castro's brother, plans to step down as party chief, ending his family's six-decade grip of the communist island.

Castro, 89, didn't say who would be taking his place, but he's likely to cede his position to Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel.

The hand-off comes as Cuba has seen its economy hammered by the pandemic and longstanding U.S. sanctions. Its primary financial backer, Venezuela, is also in the midst of an economic collapse, making it an unreliable ally.

Presidido por el General de Ejército Raúl Castro Ruz, Primer Secretario del Comité Central del Partido Comunista de Cuba, quedó inaugurado hace unos instantes en el Palacio de Convenciones de La Habana, [#Cuba](#), el [#8voCongresoPCC](#) [#CubaSocialista](#) [#SoñarYContinuar](#) pic.twitter.com/E3LUnnInjd — Partido Com. de Cuba (@PartidoPCC) [April 16, 2021](#)

Cuba's economy shrank 11% in 2020. Economy Minister Alejandro Gil has forecast it [will rebound](#) 6% to 7% this year.

Diaz-Canel, who took office in 2018, has been pushing dramatic economic reforms since January, including ending a dual currency system. That move was seen as an economic necessity but has sapped purchasing power and decimated savings at a time when some basic goods are running scarce.

The reforms have also included wage and price hikes, and opening up more sectors of the economy to the entrepreneurial class -- loosening the state's stranglehold on business.

The economic downturn, combined with the pandemic, have exposed the state's weakness and helped fuel social unrest.

'Anachronistic'

Cuba's Communist Party is an "anachronism" compared to other communist countries, said John Kavulich, the president of the U.S.-Cuba Trade and Economic Council, a New York-based think-tank.

Unlike Cuba, China and Vietnam "understand how to make a country functional with a Communist Party," he said. "Neither country operates at a deficit. Neither country has issues paying its bills. Both countries have a robust private sector -- sometimes a bit too robust for their respective political landscapes, but robust, nonetheless."

The congress meets every five years. During the last meeting, in 2016, Castro had said he planned to step down in 2021.

As he entered the meeting hall in Havana Friday he received a standing ovation before he gave the inaugural address, blasting the US economic embargo and asking the nation to stay the socialist course.

US Senator Marco Rubio, a Florida Republican of Cuban descent, said a passing of the torch during the party's congress means little.

"Raul Castro stepping down as head of the Communist Party in Cuba isn't real change," he wrote on Twitter earlier this week. "But real change is already underway nonetheless."

The Miami Herald

Miami, Florida

13 April 2021

'There aren't sugar daddies.' Cuba's Miguel Díaz-Canel faces tough choices amid Castro exit

By David Ovalle

Apr. 13—In nearly three years as Cuba's handpicked president, Miguel Díaz-Canel's public image has been a stark contrast to the military fatigues and starched suits of his predecessors, Fidel and Raúl Castro.

Díaz-Canel is often photographed in a guayabera shirt and appears at official functions holding hands with his wife. During his first official presidential trip to the United States for the United Nations General Assembly, he met with tech company representatives and spent time chatting up Cuban Americans who favor engagement with the communist island.

The 60-year-old — who was born after the 1959 revolution — is also a regular on YouTube and Twitter, an attempt to connect with the island's younger and increasingly connected population.

But life hasn't changed for most Cubans under Díaz-Canel.

While he's ushered in some long-anticipated economic reforms, his tenure has been marked by the most crippling economic crisis on the island in decades, exacerbated by U.S. sanctions levied under former President Donald Trump. The crises have been unrelenting: a Cuban airliner crashed, killing 112 people, a tornado battered Havana, and the coronavirus pandemic strained the nation's healthcare system. Authorities, meanwhile, continue to crack down on increasingly vocal critics who have staged several rare protests in Havana.

Now as Cuba's Communist Party Congress prepares to convene Friday, and Raúl Castro plans to retire, many will be watching closely to see whether Díaz-Canel emerges from his predecessor's shadow to chart his own path. Díaz-Canel has been walking a fine line, attempting to usher Cuba into some semblance of a 21st century economy while hewing to the one-party communist system that has ruled the island with an iron grip for over six decades.

But the turmoil of the last three years could pave the way for a shakeup.

"It gives him a foundation to make changes that would not have been made on a voluntary basis," said John Kavulich, the president of the U.S.-Cuba Trade and Economic Council. "Cuba tends to only make changes when it feels it has to, and then once it feels it has passed the problem, it then reverts back. The Díaz-Canel administration doesn't have that luxury. There aren't sugar daddies — meaning other countries — coming to its aid."

Díaz-Canel's rise to power has been years in the making.

He was named vice president of the country in 2013. That's when Raúl Castro announced that he would vacate the presidency in 2018, handing over the reigns to Díaz-Canel, widely seen as a loyal bureaucrat who rose through the ranks of the island's Communist Party. Raúl Castro held on to his title as first secretary of the party, a position considered more powerful than president. Díaz-Canel is considered a top contender for that post when he steps down.

Despite his long history in Cuban governance, Díaz-Canel was not widely known on the international stage. A trained electrical engineer, he parlayed his time with the Union of Young Communists into becoming the party's liaison to Nicaragua in 1987. The appointment was a big deal — Díaz-Canel was only in his mid 20s, and Nicaragua was seen as an important communist ally in Latin America.

From 1994 to 2003, he went on to serve as a regional party chief, first in Cuba's Villa Clara province, and then in Holguin, a region on the island's eastern side — posts that kept him in the eye of the local public, where he cultivated the image of a hard-working everyman who hosted a radio show and even supported rock festivals, art shows and a gay nightclub.

By 2013, years after Raúl Castro took over power from his ailing brother, Díaz-Canel was named vice president and the eventual successor to the presidency.

Kavulich said Díaz-Canel was the "perfect successor" to Raúl Castro.

"That's because Miguel Díaz-Canel did not have a historical persona. He was, and remains, a bureaucrat, a technocrat, non-threatening, from a physical standpoint. He has begun the process of normalizing the role of the presidency in Cuba for the first time since prior to the revolution," Kavulich said.

Optics certainly mattered. Throughout his vice presidency, he displayed the tact of a modern politician, glad-handing with world leaders on trips abroad and even U.S. Congressional leaders who visited the island after former U.S. President Barack Obama announced the normalization of relations between the countries. Still, Díaz-Canel's speeches never strayed from the usual Marxist jargon and revolutionary slogans. In 2017, a video leaked online showing Díaz-Canel, during a meeting of party officials, taking a hardline stance, ripping dissidents and saying Cuba would not make any concessions to the United States.

"People saw him as young, energetic and open minded," said William LeoGrande, an expert on Latin America and professor at American University. "Then, he gave that famous speech to a closed-door meeting of party officials. People wondered if he was a hardliner pretending to be a moderate, or a moderate trying to reassure hardliners he won't be Gorbachev."

It's a line Díaz-Canel has continued to straddle, even when he assumed the presidency in April 2018, championing a theme of "continuity."

"The generational change in our government should not give hope to the adversaries of the revolution," he declared during a U.N. speech in September 2018. "We are continuity, not a rupture."

By then, however, Cuba and the global stage was vastly different than even just a few years earlier.

More Cubans have access to the internet — and forums to lambaste Díaz-Canel and government as the economy collapsed. When Díaz-Canel started his own Twitter account, he quoted Fidel Castro, saying in Spanish that "man needs something more than bread. He needs honesty. He needs dignity. He needs respect. He really needs to be treated like a human being. Is there any country that has done more for human rights than Cuba?"

The words drew mocking jabs from hundreds on social media; the post coincided with a shortage of bread across the island.

Just last week, Cubans armed with cellphones captured video that went viral online showing a crowd in Havana loudly cursing Díaz-Canel after preventing the arrest of a rapper named Maykel Osogbo, who is a member of the San Isidro protest movement.

"One of the new variables that Díaz-Canel has had to contend with is that internet access is available in a more massive way than what was happening prior to 2018," said Michael Bustamante, a Cuba expert at Florida International University's Cuban Research Institute. "Cubans on Twitter and meme culture allowed a new young generation to sort of constantly cast a critical eye on the state and in a sarcastic way at that."

In turn, Díaz-Canel's government has turned to familiar ways to stifle internal critics, jailing and fining independent journalists who have also found a wider audience in Cuba. Amnesty International last year condemned the censorship of reporting on the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the country.

Last fall, when a group of some 300 artists and activists mounted a rare public protest in Havana over civil liberties, the Díaz-Canel government mounted a publicity campaign to depict them as agents of the United States and anti-Castro plotters in Miami.

"They have put on a media show for us. There is an unconventional warfare strategy to try to overthrow the revolution," Díaz-Canel said at a rally. "This is the last attempt by the Trumpistas and the anti-Cuban mafia. They had on their agenda that before the end of the year the Cuban revolution had to fall."

Roberto Veiga, a Cuban political analyst and member of the Inter-American Dialogue, a Washington think tank, said the president is quick to cast general criticism as a conspiracy by the Americans.

"In regards to the problem of artists and activists, Díaz-Canel is out of touch and incompetent," he said. "Apparently, he doesn't consider criticism as an essential component of politics."

The economy, most experts say, will ultimately be Díaz-Canel's biggest challenge if he takes over as party secretary.

Cuba's economy is in its worst shape since the collapse of the Soviet Union, contracting 11% in 2020, according to government figures. Venezuela's staggering economic collapse has diminished valuable oil shipments. Trump, reversing Obama's policies, instituted a series of punishing economic sanctions designed to squeeze the Cuban government — including capping remittances that can be sent to families in Cuba.

"When people judge Díaz-Canel on his performance, it's going to be on the performance on the economy," LeoGrande said.

The pandemic has been a major factor in the country's economic woes, although experts say the Díaz-Canel's government has largely managed the health crisis well compared to its neighbors.

"That they've done so under severe resource constraints aggravated by U.S. sanctions is notable. Cuba's public health infrastructure, resource depleted as it is, has held up," Bustamante said.

But the pandemic has shut down tourism, one of the country's chief money makers. Cubans are waiting endless hours in line at state-run supermarkets with bare shelves.

The Cuban government outlined certain economic reforms years ago, but it was only in recent months that Díaz-Canel finally announced their implementation.

On Jan. 1, Cuba unified its dual currency system, a measure meant to make the economy easier to navigate for much-needed foreign investors. But that hasn't been good for average Cubans, yet.

"The stores changed to U.S. dollars. The prices of everything skyrocketed. The task of ordering [goods] has been a total disaster, with officials saying one thing today and another completely different tomorrow," said Verónica García, 56, a resident of Camaguey, who called the island's president a "puppet."

In recent weeks, the island's ministry of foreign trade and investment also announced it would be open to investments from Cuban Americans in a bid to help jump start the economy. Last month, the Cuban government announced an expansion of small private businesses such a software programming, small-scale veterinarians and music teachers. The list, however, does not include industries such as journalism, medicine or architecture.

"He's started reforms," said Arturo Levy Lopez, a Cuba expert and professor at Holy Names University in Oakland, Calif. "His biggest problem is that he keeps defining his presidency as one of continuity."

How quick Cuba's outlook shifts will also depend on external factors like the pandemic, how soon tourists return and to what extent the Biden administration loosens sanctions, LeoGrande said.

"Biden promised to undue Trump's sanctions that hurt Cuban families," he said. "Remittances is on the top of that list. That's literally billions of dollars a year."

Díaz-Canel's future could depend on what happens when the party congress begins this week.

Miami's Marcell Felipe, the head of the staunchly anti-Castro Inspire America Foundation, believes that the Cuban military holds — and will continue to hold — true power on the island. He believes Díaz-Canel is nothing more than a "mid-level manager" to powerful Cuban General Luis Alberto Rodríguez López-Calleja, who manages a conglomerate of the island's state-owned businesses.

"The recipe is ripe for change and there is no question it will come. How and when it will come is the question," Felipe said. "But one thing is clear: Díaz-Canel does not have the power to effect change."

Cuba watchers will be reading the tea leaves, examining who gets promoted — and most importantly, who leaves the government — when the congress convenes. If Raúl Castro fully retires, as does other revolutionary government figures such as 90-year-old José Ramón Machado Ventura and 88-year-old Ramiro Valdés Menéndez, it might open a space for Díaz-Canel to further reform the economy, analysts say.

Said Kavulich: "The best result for Miguel Díaz-Canel would for Raúl Castro to take off his uniform, retire and enjoy his great grandchildren."

El Nuevo Herald

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13 April 2021

‘No hay sugar daddies’. Miguel Díaz-Canel enfrenta decisiones difíciles con la salida de Castro

por David Ovalle

Foto de archivo. El gobernante cubano Miguel Díaz-Canel (der.) asiste a una sesión parlamentaria junto con Raúl Castro, el 10 de octubre de 2019 en La Habana. HO Cubavision/AFP vía Getty Images

En los casi tres años que lleva como presidente de Cuba, la imagen pública de Miguel Díaz-Canel ha sido un marcado contraste con los uniformes militares y los trajes bien planchados de sus predecesores, Fidel y Raúl Castro.

Díaz-Canel es fotografiado a menudo con una camisa guayabera y aparece en los actos oficiales tomado de la mano de su esposa. Durante su primer viaje presidencial oficial a Estados Unidos para asistir a la Asamblea General de Naciones Unidas, se reunió con representantes de empresas tecnológicas y dedicó tiempo a charlar con los cubanoamericanos que están a favor del involucramiento con la isla comunista.

Este hombre de 60 años —quien nació después de la revolución de 1959— es también un habitual de YouTube y Twitter, en un intento de conectar con la población más joven y cada vez más conectada de la isla.

Pero la vida no ha cambiado para la mayoría de los cubanos con Díaz-Canel.

Aunque ha introducido algunas reformas económicas largamente esperadas, su mandato ha estado marcado por la crisis económica más agobiante de la isla en décadas, agravada por las sanciones de Estados Unidos impuestas por el ex presidente Donald Trump. Las crisis han sido implacables: un avión de pasajeros cubano

se estrelló, matando a 112 personas, un tornado azotó a La Habana y la pandemia del coronavirus puso a prueba al sistema de salud de la nación. Las autoridades, mientras tanto, siguen reprimiendo a los críticos que cada vez se hacen oír más, y que han protagonizado varias protestas en La Habana. Las noticias locales nunca han sido más importantes

Ahora que el Congreso del Partido Comunista de Cuba se prepara para reunirse el viernes, y que Raúl Castro planea retirarse, muchos estarán atentos para ver si Díaz-Canel sale de debajo de la sombra de su predecesor para trazar su propio camino. Díaz-Canel ha estado caminando por una línea muy fina, tratando de llevar a Cuba a algo parecido a una economía del siglo XXI, mientras se aferra al sistema comunista unipartidista que ha gobernado la isla con un control férreo durante más de seis décadas.

Sin embargo, la agitación de los últimos tres años pudiera allanar el camino para una reorganización. “Le da una base para hacer cambios que no se habrían hecho de forma voluntaria”, dijo John Kavulich, presidente del Consejo Económico y Comercial Estados Unidos-Cuba. “Cuba tiende a hacer cambios solo cuando siente que tiene que hacerlo, y luego, una vez que siente que ha pasado el problema, vuelve a retroceder. La administración Díaz-Canel no tiene ese lujo. No hay sugar daddies –es decir, otros países– que acudan en su ayuda”.

La llegada al poder de Díaz-Canel lleva años preparándose.

Fue nombrado vicepresidente del país en 2013. Fue entonces cuando Raúl Castro anunció que dejaría la presidencia en 2018, entregando las riendas a Díaz-Canel, ampliamente considerado como un burócrata leal que ascendió en las filas del Partido Comunista de la isla. Raúl Castro mantuvo su título de primer secretario del partido, un cargo considerado más poderoso que el de presidente. Díaz-Canel está considerado como uno de los principales aspirantes a ese puesto cuando se retire.

Foto de archivo del 28 de octubre de 2020 donde se muestra al líder del gobernante Partido Comunista de Cuba Raúl Castro (centro) saludando junto al presidente cubano Miguel Díaz-Canel (izq.), durante la sesión anual del Parlamento cubano en el Palacio de Convenciones en La Habana. ARIEL LEY ACN/AFP vía Getty Images

A pesar de su larga trayectoria en el gobierno cubano, Díaz-Canel no era muy conocido en la escena internacional.

Ingeniero eléctrico de formación, aprovechó su paso por la Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas para convertirse en enlace del partido con Nicaragua en 1987. El nombramiento fue todo un acontecimiento: Díaz-Canel solo tenía veintitantos años y Nicaragua era considerada un importante aliado comunista en América Latina. De 1994 a 2003, fue jefe regional del partido, primero en la provincia cubana de Villa Clara y luego en Holguín, una región del este de la isla; puestos que lo mantuvieron en el punto de mira del público local, donde cultivó la imagen de un hombre trabajador que presentaba un programa de radio e incluso apoyaba festivales de rock, espectáculos artísticos y una discoteca gay.

En 2013, años después de que Raúl Castro tomara el poder de su hermano enfermo, Díaz-Canel fue nombrado vicepresidente y eventual sucesor en la presidencia.

Kavulich dijo que Díaz-Canel era el “sucesor perfecto” de Raúl Castro.

“Eso es porque Miguel Díaz-Canel no tenía un personaje histórico. Era, y sigue siendo, un burócrata, un tecnócrata, no amenazante, desde el punto de vista físico. Ha iniciado el proceso de normalización del papel de la presidencia en Cuba por primera vez desde antes de la revolución”, dijo Kavulich.

La óptica es ciertamente importante. A lo largo de su vicepresidencia, mostró el tacto de un político moderno, saludando a los líderes mundiales en sus viajes al extranjero e incluso a los líderes del Congreso estadounidense que visitaron la isla después de que el ex presidente de Estados Unidos, Barack Obama, anunciara la normalización de las relaciones entre los países.

Sin embargo, los discursos de Díaz-Canel nunca se alejaron de la habitual jerga marxista y las consignas revolucionarias. En 2017, se filtró en internet un video en el que se veía a Díaz-Canel, durante una reunión

de funcionarios del partido, adoptando una postura de línea dura, arremetiendo contra los disidentes y diciendo que Cuba no haría ninguna concesión a Estados Unidos.

El gobernante de Cuba, Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez participa en la ceremonia de colocación de coronas en el memorial de la Segunda Guerra Mundial en el cementerio Piskaryovskoye en San Petersburgo, Rusia. 27 de octubre de 2019.

“La gente lo veía como joven, vigoroso y de mente abierta”, dijo William LeoGrande, experto en América Latina y profesor de la American University. “Luego, pronunció ese famoso discurso en una reunión a puerta cerrada de funcionarios del partido. La gente se preguntó si era un intransigente fingiendo ser un moderado, o un moderado tratando de asegurar a los intransigentes que no será Gorbachov”.

Es una línea en la que Díaz-Canel ha continuado a horcajadas, incluso cuando asumió la presidencia en abril de 2018, defendiendo un tema de “continuidad”.

“El cambio generacional en nuestro gobierno no debe dar esperanzas a los adversarios de la revolución”, declaró durante un discurso en la ONU en septiembre de 2018. “Somos continuidad, no ruptura”.

Para entonces, sin embargo, Cuba y el escenario global eran enormemente diferentes que incluso unos años antes.

Más cubanos tienen acceso a internet, y foros para arremeter contra Díaz-Canel y el gobierno mientras la economía se derrumba. Cuando Díaz-Canel abrió su propia cuenta de Twitter, citó a Fidel Castro, diciendo que “el hombre necesita algo más que pan: necesita honra, necesita dignidad, necesita respeto, necesita que se le trate verdaderamente como a un ser humano, ¿habrá algún país que haya hecho más por los derechos humanos que Cuba?”

Las palabras provocaron las burlas de cientos de personas en las redes sociales; la publicación coincidió con la escasez de pan en toda la isla.

La semana pasada, cubanos armados con teléfonos móviles captaron un video que se hizo viral en internet en el que se veía a una multitud en La Habana maldiciendo a gritos a Díaz-Canel tras impedir la detención de un rapero llamado Maykel Osogbo, miembro del movimiento de protesta de San Isidro.

“Cuando yo diga @DiazCanelB, ustedes dicen singao, @DiazCanelB singao, @DiazCanelB singao”

Ahora mismo corean eso desde la sede del @Mov_sanisidro. Maykel Osorbo está con unas esposas porque se le escapó a la policía que intentó detenerlo. pic.twitter.com/yEs4q2XSsO

— Norges Rodríguez (@norges14) April 4, 2021

“Una de las nuevas variables con las que ha tenido que lidiar Díaz-Canel es que el acceso a internet está disponible de forma más masiva que lo que ocurría antes de 2018”, dijo Michael Bustamante, experto en Cuba del Instituto de Investigaciones Cubanas de la Florida International University. “Los cubanos en Twitter y la cultura de los memes permitieron a una nueva generación joven lanzar una especie de mirada crítica constante sobre el Estado y de una manera sarcástica”.

A su vez, el gobierno de Díaz-Canel ha recurrido a formas conocidas para reprimir a los críticos internos, encarcelando y multando a periodistas independientes que también han encontrado una mayor audiencia en Cuba. El año pasado, Amnistía Internacional condenó la censura de la información sobre la pandemia del COVID-19 y su impacto en el país.

El otoño pasado, cuando un grupo de unos 300 artistas y activistas organizó una inusual protesta pública en La Habana por las libertades civiles, el gobierno de Díaz-Canel montó una campaña publicitaria para presentarlos como agentes de Estados Unidos y conspiradores anticastristas en Miami.

“Nos han montado un espectáculo mediático. Hay una estrategia de guerra no convencional para tratar de derrocar la revolución”, dijo Díaz-Canel en un mitin. “Este es el intento más reciente de los trumpistas y de la mafia anticubana. Tenían en su agenda que antes de fin de año tenía que caer la revolución cubana”.

Roberto Veiga, analista político cubano y miembro del Inter-American Dialogue, un centro de análisis de Washington, dijo que el presidente se apresura a calificar las críticas generales como una conspiración de los estadounidenses.

“Acerca de la actual problemática con artistas y activistas Díaz-Canel se ubica como ajeno, fuera de competencia”, dijo. “Al parecer no considera la crítica como componente esencial de la política”.

La economía, según la mayoría de los expertos, será en última instancia el mayor reto de Díaz-Canel si asume la secretaría del partido.

La economía cubana está en su peor momento desde el colapso de la Unión Soviética, con una contracción del 11% en 2020, según cifras del gobierno. El asombroso colapso económico de Venezuela ha reducido los valiosos envíos de petróleo. Trump, revirtiendo las políticas de Obama, instituyó una serie de sanciones económicas punitivas diseñadas para apretar al gobierno cubano, incluyendo la limitación de las remesas que se pueden enviar a las familias en Cuba.

“Cuando la gente juzgue a Díaz-Canel por su desempeño, será por el desempeño en la economía”, dijo LeoGrande.

La pandemia ha sido un factor importante en los problemas económicos del país, aunque los expertos afirman que el gobierno de Díaz-Canel ha gestionado la crisis sanitaria en gran medida bien en comparación con sus vecinos.

“El hecho de que lo hayan hecho bajo severas limitaciones de recursos agravadas por las sanciones de Estados Unidos es notable. La infraestructura de salud pública de Cuba, con los recursos agotados, ha resistido”, dijo Bustamante.

Familiar de las niñas muertas por un derrumbe en La Habana critica a Díaz-Canel

Un familiar de una de las niñas que murió en La Habana tras un derrumbe este lunes 27 de enero, criticó duramente al gobernante cubano, quien tardó más de 40 horas en responder a la tragedia. By Cortesía | Esther Medina

Pero la pandemia ha paralizado el turismo, una de las principales fuentes de ingresos del país. Los cubanos esperan interminables horas en las colas filas de los supermercados estatales con los estantes vacíos.

El gobierno cubano esbozó ciertas reformas económicas hace años, pero apenas en los últimos meses Díaz-Canel anunció finalmente su aplicación.

El primero de enero, Cuba unificó su sistema de doble moneda, una medida destinada a facilitar la navegación por la economía a los tan necesitados inversores extranjeros. Pero eso no ha sido bueno para el cubano promedio, todavía.

“Las tiendas pasaron a ser en dólares americanos, una moneda que nosotros no cobramos, los precios de todo se dispararon, la tarea ordenamiento ha sido un desastre total con funcionarios que hoy dicen una cosa y mañana dicen otra completamente distinta”, dijo Verónica García, de 56 años, residente en Camagüey, quien calificó al presidente de la isla de “títere”.

En las últimas semanas, el Ministerio de Comercio Exterior e Inversión Extranjera de la isla también anunció que estaría abierto a las inversiones de los cubano-estadounidenses en un intento de ayudar a poner en marcha la economía. El mes pasado, el gobierno cubano anunció la expansión de pequeños negocios privados como la programación de software, veterinarios a pequeña escala y profesores de música. La lista, sin embargo, no incluye industrias como el periodismo, la medicina o la arquitectura.

“Ha iniciado reformas”, dijo Arturo Levy López, experto en Cuba y profesor de la Holy Names University en Oakland, California. “Su mayor problema es que sigue definiendo su presidencia como de continuidad”. La rapidez con la que cambie el panorama de Cuba también dependerá de factores externos como la pandemia, la rapidez con la que regresen los turistas y hasta qué punto la administración de Biden relaja las sanciones, dijo LeoGrande.

“Biden prometió deshacer las sanciones de Trump que perjudican a las familias cubanas”, dijo. “Las remesas están en la cima de esa lista. Son literalmente miles de millones de dólares al año”.

En esta foto de archivo del 10 de diciembre de 2019, cubanos muestran billetes de dólar y CUC en una calle de La Habana. YAMIL LAGE / AFP / Getty Images

El futuro de Díaz-Canel pudiera depender de lo que ocurra cuando comience el congreso del partido esta semana.

Marcell Felipe, de Miami, jefe de la anticastrista a ultranza Inspire America Foundation, cree que los militares cubanos tienen –y seguirán teniendo– el verdadero poder en la isla. Cree que Díaz-Canel no es más que un “gerente de nivel medio” del poderoso general cubano Luis Alberto Rodríguez López-Calleja, quien dirige un conglomerado de empresas estatales de la isla.

“La receta está madura para el cambio y no hay duda de que llegará. La cuestión es cómo y cuándo llegará”, dijo Felipe. “Pero una cosa está clara: Díaz-Canel no tiene el poder para efectuar el cambio”.

Los observadores de Cuba leerán las hojas de té, examinando quién asciende –y lo que es más importante, quién deja el gobierno– cuando se reúna el congreso. Si Raúl Castro se retira por completo, al igual que otras figuras del gobierno revolucionario como José Ramón Machado Ventura, de 90 años, y Ramiro Valdés Menéndez, de 88 años, podría abrir un espacio para que Díaz-Canel siga reformando la economía, dicen los analistas.

Dijo Kavulich: “El mejor resultado para Miguel Díaz-Canel sería que Raúl Castro se quitara el uniforme, se retirara y disfrutara de sus bisnietos”.

Der Bund

Bern, Switzerland

27 March 2021

LafargeHolcim versucht, den Hals aus der Schlinge zu ziehen

Im Rechtsstreit um eine verschleierte Beteiligung an einem kubanischen Zementwerk hat sich der Schweizer Konzern mit den US-Klägern auf eine Mediation geeinigt. Dies könnte das Vorspiel zu einem Vergleich sein.

Andreas Knobloch, Havanna, Peter Burkhardt



Erst nachdem er die Führung des Zementriesen übernommen hatte, legte LafargeHolcim die Beteiligung erstmals offen: Konzernchef Jan Jenisch. Foto: Getty Images

Noch vor kurzem zeigte sich der weltgrösste Zementkonzern LafargeHolcim im Rechtsstreit in den USA wegen der Beteiligung an einem Zementwerk auf verstaatlichtem Grundbesitz auf Kuba kompromisslos. In seinem Jahresbericht schrieb das Unternehmen mit Hauptsitz in Zug am 26. Februar: «Obwohl die geltend gemachten Beträge erheblich sind, ist LafargeHolcim der Ansicht, dass die Klage unbegründet ist, und wird die Angelegenheit vor Gericht vehement verteidigen.»

Doch nun ist LafargeHolcim offenbar zu einem Vergleich bereit. Denn das Unternehmen und die US-Kläger haben einer privaten Schiedsgerichtsbarkeit zugestimmt. Und eine solche ist üblicherweise der Auftakt zu einer aussergerichtlichen Einigung.

Laut einer beim zuständigen Bundesgericht in Florida eingereichten gemeinsamen Vereinbarung beider Seiten wurde LafargeHolcim zur Beantwortung der Klage eine Fristverlängerung bis zum 21. Mai gewährt. «Die Kläger und der Beklagte LafargeHolcim Ltd. haben am 22. April 2021 eine Mediation vor dem Ehrwürdigen Layn R. Phillips von Phillips ADR Enterprises angesetzt», heisst es in dem am Dienstag veröffentlichten Dokument.

Phillips ist ein angesehener ehemaliger US-Bundesstaatsanwalt. Die von ihm gegründete Phillips ADR Enterprises eine Streitbeilegungsfirma, die sich auf die Schlichtung komplexer Streitigkeiten spezialisiert hat.

Bei der Klage gegen LafargeHolcim geht es um die Entschädigung für ein Grundstück, das nach der kubanischen Revolution beschlagnahmt wurde und auf dem sich heute das Zementwerk Carlos Marx befindet, das der Schweizer Konzern zusammen mit der kubanischen Regierung betreibt.

Laut Gericht sind die Kläger, zwei Dutzend Privatpersonen und Erbengemeinschaften verstorbener Personen, «berechtigt, den aktuellen Marktwert der Immobilie, der auf 270 Millionen US-Dollar geschätzt wird, zuzüglich Anwaltskosten, Zinsen und anderer Kosten zurückzufordern».

Sollten die Richter dem Konzern Vorsatz bei der Verschleierung der Beteiligung unterstellen, könnte allein der Schadenersatz bis zu 970 Millionen Dollar betragen.

Dem Zementhersteller [droht überdies eine Milliardenbusse wegen Verletzung des Wirtschaftsembargos](#) der USA gegen Kuba, wie die Tamedia-Zeitungen als erste berichtet hatten.

«Wir verstossen nicht gegen US-Sanktionen.» LafargeHolcim

Vonseiten des Unternehmens heisst es dazu lediglich: «Wenn es um Kuba geht: Wir legen Informationen darüber in unseren Finanzberichten transparent offen und verstossen nicht gegen US-Sanktionen.» Aufgrund des laufenden Rechtsstreits gebe man keinen weiteren Kommentar ab.

Trump machte die Klage überhaupt erst möglich

Tatsächlich ist es wichtig, zu betonen, dass LafargeHolcim mit dem Engagement auf der Karibikinsel weder gegen eidgenössisches noch europäisches Recht verstösst. Das eigentliche Problem ist die extraterritoriale Anwendung der US-Blockadegesetzgebung.

Als erster US-Präsident aktivierte Donald Trump Klausel III des 1996 erlassenen Libertad Act, des sogenannten Helms-Burton-Gesetzes. Besagte Klausel erlaubt Schadensersatzklagen vor US-Gerichten gegen Unternehmen, die nach der Revolution verstaatlichten Besitz nutzen. Dadurch wurde das Verfahren gegen LafargeHolcim überhaupt nur möglich.

Mit der Wahl von Joe Biden zum US-Präsidenten hat sich die politische Grosswetterlage verändert. Zwar erklärte eine Sprecherin des Weissen Hauses erst vor wenigen Tagen, eine Änderung der Kuba-Politik gehöre nicht zu den obersten Prioritäten des Präsidenten. Aber «ich denke, die Chancen stehen gut, dass Biden Klausel-III-Klagen wieder aussetzt», sagt Patrick Borchers, Rechtsprofessor an der Creighton University School of Law. «Angesichts der Tatsache, dass Klausel-III-Klagen zu Reibereien mit unseren engsten Verbündeten führen, erwarte ich, dass er sie wieder suspendiert.»

Doch eine Aussetzung von Klausel III habe keinen Einfluss auf bereits eingereichte Klagen, gibt John S. Kavulich, Präsident des in New York ansässigen US-Cuba Trade and Economic Council, zu bedenken. Eine Mediation wiederum würde von Gerichten im Allgemeinen während des Prozesses vor einem Gerichtsverfahren verlangt. «Was diesen Fall einzigartig macht», so Kavulich, «ist, dass die Mediation dem Gericht gemeinsam gemeldet wurde.»

Wie ein Schachspiel

Aufschlussreich könne sein, von welcher Seite die Initiative für die Mediation ausging, sagt er. «Wenn der Beklagte eine Mediation vorschlägt, könnte man annehmen, dass eine Einigung einem Prozess vorgezogen wird, um – und das ist wichtig – vor allem das förmliche Beweisverfahren zu beenden, das Aufschluss über Unternehmensentscheidungen geben kann, die ein Unternehmen gegenüber Konkurrenten möglicherweise lieber vertraulich behandelt.»

Wenn die Prozessparteien einer Mediation zustimmen, bestehe zumindest die Erwartung, dass ein Vergleich praktikabel ist, meint Kavulich. «Das Verfahren kann jedoch auch eine Anstrengung sowohl des Beklagten als auch des Klägers sein, zusätzliche Informationen darüber zu gewinnen, was jede Seite denkt. Wie ein Schachspiel.»

Beteiligung jahrelang verschleiert

LafargeHolcim ist seit dem Jahr 2000 zu 50 Prozent am Zementwerk Carlos Marx beteiligt. Die andere Hälfte hält der kubanische Staat. Die Vorgängerfirmen Holderbank und Holcim [haben die Beteiligung nie offengelegt](#), wie die SonntagsZeitung aufdeckte. Im Gegenteil: Sie wurde richtiggehend verschleiert, und zwar bis 2018.

Zur Tarnung wurden mehrere Firmen dazwischengeschaltet. Erst im Halbjahresbericht 2018 – wenige Monate nach dem Antritt des neuen Konzernchefs Jan Jenisch – erwähnte LafargeHolcim die Beteiligung erstmals.

Thomson Reuters London, United Kingdom 18 March 2021

U.S. terrorism sponsor listing further complicates Cuba banking

By Marc Frank

HAVANA (Reuters) - Former President Donald Trump's decision to put Cuba back on the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism just before he left office threw up fresh obstacles to international banking with the island, according to five Havana-based foreign businessmen and diplomats.



FILE PHOTO: A vintage car passes by a billboard which reads in Spanish "No to the blockade - No to the Helms-Burton law" in Candelaria, Cuba, February 28, 2021. Picture taken February 28, 2021. REUTERS/Alexandre Meneghini

The businessmen and diplomats, all of whom requested anonymity, said the few Western banks willing to stand up to already comprehensive U.S. sanctions on the island have stopped transactions or implemented new layers of compliance.

Washington took Communist-run Cuba off the terrorism list in 2015 as part of a thaw in relations under former President Barack Obama. The Trump administration took several steps to reverse that detente, including the terrorism redesignation just days before Trump left office in January.

One of the businessmen cited an email sent by a European bank on March 16, which said in part: "Our legal department after analyzing all the documentation said they will not allow us to open an account for you as they estimate that the risk of working with a company with business in Cuba is too high".

“These types of letters are nothing new but are increasingly frequent and common,” the businessman said. He asked that the bank not be named.

He said the non-Cuban company planned to receive proceeds from Cuban exports abroad and pay island suppliers abroad, thus there would have been no transactions directly with Cuba.

The increased caution resulted in “the number of counter parties being reduced, increased delays and costs, thereby undermining Cuba’s ability to insert itself into global production chains,” he said.

President Joe Biden’s administration has said it is reviewing the terrorism relisting.

Cuba has called the Trump decision a politically motivated move aimed at placating Cuban-American exiles and sabotaging efforts to improve relations.

Many analysts believe Biden will reverse the terrorism decision in the coming months, but in the meantime it is further undermining the Cuban economy, which fell 11% last year and has shown no sign of improvement so far in 2021, with key earner tourism down 95% compared with the same period last year due to the pandemic.

In giving reasons for the relisting, then Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Cuba was “repeatedly providing support for acts of international terrorism” by harboring U.S. fugitives and Colombian rebel leaders, as well as supporting Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro.

“The actual issues given by Trump and Pompeo for their move of harboring for example some alleged murderers would normally be dealt with by diplomacy if the country were any other but Cuba,” said Paul Hare, a former British ambassador to the island who lectures on global studies at Boston University.

INCREASED COMPLIANCE

John Kavulich, president of the U.S.-Cuba Trade and Economic Council, said that banks have to protect themselves from scrutiny by the U.S. government.

“Those financial institutions which continue their Cuba-related transactions have been required to expand their internal compliance, which was already onerous, even though most c-suite executives believe that the Biden administration will eventually remove Cuba from the list,” he said.

The issue has affected not just businesses but some embassies, which have had trouble accessing their accounts since the January relisting, the diplomats said.

“We’re still having a problem with financial transfers for the embassy and each one of the diplomats posted here in Havana,” an Asian envoy said.

“Our European bank hasn’t been able to receive any amount of money transferred from our country due to the systematic rejection by some of the intermediate banks since mid-January of any kind of transfer related to Cuba,” he said.

Tradewinds

London, United Kingdom

24 February 2021



US-Cuba lawsuits show no signs of slowing down as Maersk sued

Continued legal actions over Cuba business has as much to do with US-Europe relations as it does the US relationship with Cuba

Los Angeles Times

Los Angeles, California

12 February 2021

POLITICS

Biden to resume remittances, travel to Cuba, but other Obama-era overtures will take a while



Young artists protest Nov. 27 in front of Havana's Ministry of Culture after police evicted a group who participated in a hunger strike. (Ismael Francisco / Associated Press)

By TRACY WILKINSON STAFF WRITER

WASHINGTON — President Obama took historic steps to thaw the hostile, Cold War-era relationship with the island nation of Cuba, 120 miles south of Miami. President Trump did his best to put everything back on ice.

Now the Biden administration says it will lift some of Trump's restrictions on business and travel between the U.S. and Cuba, and renew diplomatic talks.

But President Biden's initial actions will disappoint advocates longing for the more robust relationship that was emerging in the Obama years.

Although he promised during the campaign to aggressively reverse Trump's Cuba policy, Biden's plans will have to roll out more slowly than some of his advisors had hoped.

He faces stiff resistance in Congress from members opposed to détente with Cuba, including from one of the Senate's most powerful Democrats. At the same time, Cuba's behavior has become more controversial with repression of dissidents and support for Venezuela. And Trump left numerous obstacles, such as formally declaring Cuba a state sponsor of terrorism, which takes time and a bundle of red tape to reverse. "There was never going to be Obama Redux," said Cuba expert John Kavulich, head of an economic institute that for decades has focused on Cuba.

The Biden government will remove harsh Trump restrictions that most directly harmed civilian Cubans, administration officials said. First of those are the limits on the amount of remittances that Cuban Americans can send to their relatives on the island. The administration will also restore some of the wiring services, including Western Union, that are used to transmit the money and that the previous government blocked.

The money is a lifeline for many Cubans.

Biden's team also intends to allow more travel between the countries, people familiar with the plans said.

U.S.-origin flights to various Cuban cities were opened under Obama, along with a large cruise ship itinerary. But those mostly shut down under Trump. Obama's reasoning was that the exposure of Cubans to more Westerners would plant the seeds of democratization; Trump's people argued that a lot of the dollars spent by tourists and other visitors ended up in the hands of the Cuban military.

Biden's first steps will be taken as initial gestures, while more difficult matters are debated.

"Politically he is going to keep it limited for now," said John Caulfield, former head of the U.S. mission in Havana and specialist in U.S.-Cuba policy. Caulfield said Biden needs to see how much political will there is in Havana.

Biden may also rebuild the staff at the U.S. diplomatic mission in Havana, which sank to a skeleton crew under Trump, and resume issuing visas to Cuban nationals.

Since Biden assumed office, his aides have become more circumspect about the plans for Cuba, repeating publicly that the policy is "under review."

However, Juan Gonzalez, an Obama administration alum who is now head of Western Hemisphere affairs for Biden's National Security Council, last week confirmed broad strokes of the new policy.

Biden's "commitment on Cuba is to lift the limitations on remittances and make possible the travel of Americans to the island," he said in Spanish to Spanish-language news channel Univision.

The previous administration "only penalized Cuban Americans and the Cuban people in the middle of a pandemic" by making it difficult for them to receive money from relatives and "did nothing to try to advance a democratic future in Cuba," Gonzalez said.

Two other people who have participated in talks about Cuba with members of the administration confirmed the steps. The State Department declined comment.

Obama's opening with Cuba, announced in 2014, came in his second term, when he no longer had to worry about reelection and after the critical and traditionally Republican Florida vote in the 2012 contest had moved into his camp.

He reestablished the U.S. Embassy in Havana, made the first trip there of an American president in 90 years, and oversaw the revival of numerous bilateral operations, like the interdiction of drug traffickers.

Biden, by contrast, must confront the issue early in his first term, when not only are Florida Republicans including Sen. Marco Rubio arrayed against him, but Democratic Sen. Robert Menendez of New Jersey, a hawk on Cuba, is ascending to the powerful chairmanship of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Nine days before leaving office, Trump's Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo embedded extra obstacles that would trip up the Biden administration in its efforts to return to rapprochement with Cuba. Pompeo and Trump put Cuba on the list of state "sponsors of terrorism" with only three other countries: Iran, North Korea and Syria.

Most experts say the designation is purely political. Normally this designation comes after an extensive review by the State Department and then consultation with Congress. That did not happen.

Politically it puts Biden in the tricky position of having to affirmatively recertify that Cuba is not sponsoring terrorism, and Havana's support for Colombia's leftist guerrillas and Venezuela dictator Nicolas Maduro will complicate that. Cuba and Venezuela exchange intelligence officers, doctors, oil and possibly weapons. While there is wide confidence among lawmakers and academics that Biden will fulfill some of his Cuba campaign promises, there is also concern the administration will stumble if it begins to demand Cuba take reciprocal steps, such as freeing dissidents from jail, to "earn" U.S. concessions. It's a tactic that has never worked.

"There will be a temptation to demand reciprocity and concessions from the Cubans in return," said Peter Kornbluh, coauthor of "Back Channel to Cuba," a book recounting Obama's secret negotiations. "The history of negotiations with Cuba demonstrates that the quid pro quo approach is a non-starter, and a recipe

for policy failure.”

Sen. Patrick J. Leahy (D-Vt.) has lobbied both Biden and Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken on reestablishing full ties with Cuba, making similar warnings.

Richard Feinberg, a veteran of the Clinton White House and now an international political economy professor at UC San Diego, also cautioned against “overdemanding,” saying the Biden team is “overestimating U.S. leverage worldwide.”

“The administration is looking for positive developments on the island to wrap their announcements around,” Feinberg said. Earlier this month, Diaz-Canel, struggling with a moribund economy, vastly expanded the list of small businesses that Cubans may operate, the most important step Havana has taken in allowing a form of private enterprise.

The most ardent Cuba advocates in Congress and elsewhere are reviving a campaign to end the 59-year-old U.S. embargo on Cuba, initiated by President Kennedy to isolate the island’s communist leadership. Obama, along with experts, historians and activists, long declared the embargo a failure — it never unseated revolutionary leader Fidel Castro or his successors — and it remains the sorest point Cubans cite in the troubled relationship with the United States.

It can only be lifted by Congress, where Rubio or like-minded Republicans would work to block such action.

“Our nation’s embargo on Cuba is an artifact from the 1960s,” Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.), who chairs the Senate Finance Committee, said as he introduced a bill this month to repeal the sanctions. “To continue this outdated, harmful policy of isolation would be a failure of American leadership.”

AFP

Paris, France

12 February 2021

Squeezed by sanctions, pandemic, Cuba finally opens up economy

Private enterprise, including taxi services, boomed in Cuba boomed after the historic warming of ties with Cold War rival the United States in 2014 under then-president Barack Obama YAMIL LAGE AFP/File

Havana (AFP)

Cuba is undergoing a paradigm shift: after decades of tight, centralized control, the communist government is opening up the bulk of its economy to the private sector.

While economic decline and spiralling unemployment are the main drivers, analysts say the liberalization measures can also be seen as an overture to a new US president.

"It is definitely a strong signal at a crucial moment when the US administration has said it is revising the policies of (Donald) Trump towards Cuba," said Ricardo Torres, an economist at the University of Habana. Six decades of US sanctions, toughened during Trump's term in office, have claimed a heavy toll on Cuba's economy, worsened by the coronavirus crisis and a steep drop in tourism, a critical sector.

Last month, Havana said Trump's sanctions cost the country some \$20 billion, adding that "the damage to the bilateral relationship during this time has been considerable." The Cuban economy shrank 11 percent in 2020, and exports declined by 40 percent.

At the weekend, the government in Havana announced it would authorize private enterprise in a bid to boost its economy and create jobs, though limited to individual entrepreneurs for now, not businesses. The number of authorized private activities would grow from 127 to over 2,000, but excludes 124 sectors

including the press, health and education, which remain in government hands. The reform represents a major ideological shift in a country where the government and its affiliate companies have monopolized most of the economy since 1961.

- 'Long overdue' -

Cuba began timidly opening up to private capital in the 1990s before fuller authorization in 2010, followed by a boom after the historic warming of ties with Cold War rival the United States in 2014 under then-president Barack Obama.

Today, about 600,000 Cubans -- some 13 percent of the workforce -- are employed in the private sector. Most work in hotels, restaurants, transportation and tourist accommodation. Millions of people work for the government, but the exact number is not known.

Trump reversed many of Obama's moves to ease tensions with Cuba. He banned American cruise ships stopping over on the island, blacklisted a range of Cuban companies and bosses, prosecuted foreign companies doing business there, and made it difficult for Cubans working abroad to send money home.

The new US President, Joe Biden, has promised to bring back some of Obama's policies to normalize ties, while also paying attention to human rights concerns in the country of some 11.2 million people. Some in the United States have welcomed Cuba's policy shift, which will for the first time see private salary earners in sectors such as agriculture, construction and IT.

"This is long overdue, it's welcome news. And the United States should affirm that the embargo was never intended, and will not be used, to penalize private enterprise in #Cuba," US Senator Patrick Leahy said on Twitter.

Former Obama adviser Ben Rhodes tweeted the announcement was "a big step forward for Cubans and a welcome signal. The Biden Administration can make this more beneficial for the Cuban people by resuming the opening to Cuba as soon as possible."

- Skepticism -

For many of Cuba's leaders, the change may be difficult to swallow. "There is still a lot of skepticism regarding the word 'private'," which many see "as people who can conspire against power," said Cuban economist Omar Everleny Perez.

But politicians appear to have read the writing on the wall just like in Vietnam in the 1980s, where the Communist Party managed to stay in power by heavily liberalizing the economy.

"We are still a little far from that, but (the Cuban leaders) have it in mind," said Perez of the Vietnam example. The southeast Asian country, too, was under US sanctions, lifted in 1994 after rapprochement with Washington. "So from a geopolitical point of view, there is a lesson that is important to recognize," said Perez.

For his part, Torres said Vietnam's economy was smaller and the country more rural, making change easier. But there is a lesson to be learnt from the fellow Communist country's experience: "if you want to create jobs, you have no choice but to create a framework for the private sector to grow".

John Kavulich, president of the US-Cuba Trade and Economic Council, said the Cuban government must now convince the Biden administration that it is serious about restructuring the economy.

"If the Biden administration believes the (President Miguel) Diaz-Canel administration is prepared to do what is difficult, maintain the processes despite challenges, then far easier for Washington to create opportunities for engagement," he said.

ABC

Madrid, Spain

11 February 2021

El Gobierno de Cuba veta actividades clave al sector privado y prohíbe el periodismo independiente
El régimen publica el listado con los 124 ámbitos en los que no se podrá trabajar por cuenta propia



Terraza de un paladar en La Habana Vieja, en una imagen de archivo - M. Trillo

Manuel Trillo

Lo que el Gobierno de Cuba presentó hace unos días como una apertura a la actividad económica privada en la isla deja en realidad un estrecho margen para la iniciativa de los emprendedores fuera del aparato estatal e incluso aprovecha para estrechar el cerco sobre el ya limitado ejercicio del periodismo.

Después de eliminar el pasado 6 de febrero la supresión del listado de 127 actividades permitidas para el trabajo en el sector privado, lo que el régimen anunció como una forma de desarrollar el trabajo por cuenta propia, el Ministerio de Trabajo y Seguridad Social publicó ayer a través de internet la lista de las 124 actividades que quedarán prohibidas para el trabajo por cuenta propia y que van desde las agencias de viajes o la investigación científica a la proyección de películas o las pompas fúnebres.

Según la ministra de Trabajo y Seguridad Social, Marta Elena Feitó, el sector privado emplea en la actualidad a 600.000 trabajadores, lo que supondría el 13% de la población ocupada. «Que el trabajo por cuenta propia continúe desarrollándose es el propósito de este perfeccionamiento».

La ampliación de las posibilidades para el sector privado es algo largamente esperado por buena parte de los cubanos, que sufren una grave crisis económica agravada por la pandemia. Según las estimaciones del propio Gobierno cubano, se esperaba que 2020 acabase con una caída del PIB del 11%.

Además, las novedades sobre el sector privado se producen poco después de la llegada a la Casa Blanca del demócrata Joe Biden, del que el régimen de La Habana espera un regreso a las políticas de Barack Obama respecto a la isla, tras los cuatro años de mano dura de Donald Trump. La Administración del nuevo presidente de EE.UU. ya ha avisado de que «revisará» la política de su antecesor.

Sin embargo, la lista de actividades vetadas mantiene sectores clave en manos del Estado. La fabricación de productos farmacéuticos, de vehículos, la explotación de minas y canteras, la intermediación monetaria, los seguros y reaseguros, o la ciberseguridad son otros de los ámbitos en los que la iniciativa privada no podrá meter la mano.

No se permite editar ni imprimir periódicos

El listado se ocupa en varios apartados de las restricciones para la actividad de los periodistas independientes, que vienen sufriendo en la actualidad una dura persecución, con frecuentes detenciones arbitrarias. Ahora se prohíbe expresamente las «actividades de periodistas», así como impresión de periódicos, revistas, tabloides, libros, mapas y atlas, entre otros productos, y la edición y maquetación de libros, directorios y listas de correos, periódicos, tabloides y revistas «en cualquier formato o soporte».

Para la confección de este listado, se toma como base el elaborado por el llamado Clasificador Nacional de Actividades Económicas, que incluye un total de 2.110 actividades. Como las que se prohíben al sector privado son 124, se supone que habría 1.986 que sí están permitidas a los «cuentrapropistas». Sin embargo,

en realidad esta retahíla es el resultado de subdividir hasta el ínfimo detalle las actividades de cada sector, de modo que a cada producto posible prácticamente le corresponde una actividad. Por ejemplo, una actividad es la fabricación de relojes, otra la de cajas para relojes, otra la de conmutadores horarios, otra la de parquímetros y relojes de control de entrada, etc. De esta manera el margen para el sector privado no es tan amplio como pudiera parecer a priori.

A la lista de 124 actividades prohibidas se suman aquellas consideradas ilícitas no solo para el sector privado, sino para «todos los actores económicos», como la caza y pesca de especies prohibidas, el empleo infantil o el trabajo forzado.

«El Gobierno busca sobrevivir, no el suicidio»

Las decisiones adoptadas por la Administración del presidente Miguel Díaz-Canel «están dirigidas a la supervivencia, no el suicidio político», comenta John S. Kavulich, presidente del Consejo Comercial y Económico EE.UU.-Cuba, con sede en Nueva York.

A su juicio, «los dos procesos más valiosos que la Administración de Díaz-Canel puede usar como zanahorias para lograr el compromiso de la Administración Biden son, primero, completar la unificación de las monedas y establecer un tipo de cambio flotante constante y, segundo, impulsar oportunidades para que los pequeños negocios operen de forma independiente».

En este sentido, apunta Kavulich, «si la Administración Biden cree que la Administración de Díaz-Canel está preparada para hacer lo que es difícil, mantener los procesos a pesar de los desafíos, entonces será más fácil para Washington crear oportunidades para el compromiso».

AFP

Paris, France

11 February 2021

À Cuba, une ouverture au secteur privé qui peut amadouer Biden



PHOTO YAMIL LAGE, AFP

« Clairement, c'est un signal fort à un moment clé, quand l'administration américaine vient de dire qu'elle allait réviser la politique de Donald Trump envers Cuba », qui a renforcé l'embargo en vigueur depuis 1962, note Ricardo Torres, économiste du Centre d'études de l'économie cubaine.

(La Havane) C'est un vrai changement de paradigme pour Cuba : en ouvrant largement son économie au secteur privé, le gouvernement communiste renonce à ses réticences historiques afin de relancer la croissance et l'emploi, de quoi amadouer le président américain Joe Biden, selon les analystes.

Katell ABIVEN
Agence France-Presse

« Clairement, c'est un signal fort à un moment clé, quand l'administration américaine vient de dire qu'elle allait réviser la politique de Donald Trump envers Cuba », qui a renforcé l'embargo en vigueur depuis 1962, note Ricardo Torres, économiste du Centre d'études de l'économie cubaine.

À La Havane, on se souvient avec nostalgie du réchauffement historique initié fin 2014 entre Barack Obama et Raul Castro, qui présidaient alors les deux ex-ennemis de la Guerre froide.

Obama avait encouragé, comme outil d'émancipation du peuple cubain, l'essor du secteur privé, qui a connu une véritable explosion avec l'ouverture de bars, restaurants, commerces...

Mais les entrepreneurs privés cubains restaient cantonnés à une liste de 127 activités autorisées par l'État, et ne cachaient pas leur frustration.

Désormais « c'est presque un changement de philosophie, on fait tout le contraire », s'enthousiasme Ricardo Torres : « toutes les activités (environ 2100, NDLR) sont ouvertes au privé, sauf 124 » qui resteront du ressort de l'État.

On pourra donc trouver des salariés privés dans l'agriculture, la construction, la programmation informatique ou l'enseignement des langues, a cité comme exemples la ministre du Travail Marta Elena Feito.

« Il était temps »

Sur Twitter, Ben Rhodes, ancien conseiller d'Obama, a salué la nouvelle comme « un signal bienvenu », ajoutant que « l'administration Biden peut rendre cela encore plus bénéfique pour le peuple cubain en reprenant l'ouverture avec Cuba le plus tôt possible ».

« Il était temps », a réagi le sénateur américain Patrick Leahy. « Les États-Unis doivent réaffirmer que l'embargo n'a jamais été destiné et ne sera jamais utilisé pour pénaliser les entreprises privées à Cuba ».

Toutefois, chez les dirigeants cubains « il reste encore beaucoup de scepticisme avec le mot "privé" », qu'ils préfèrent remplacer par « non étatique », « car ils ont ce problème idéologique de voir le secteur privé comme des gens pouvant conspirer contre le pouvoir », souligne l'économiste Omar Everleny Pérez.

Cette fois, il n'y a pas le choix : « la situation économique est critique, le pays a vu son PIB chuter de 11 % en 2020, les exportations de 40 %, les importations de 30 % ».

L'idée est donc de diminuer la part de l'État (85 % de l'économie) pour donner plus d'espace au secteur privé.

« Raul Castro avait dit que dans le pays il y avait 1,5 million de travailleurs en trop » dans le public, raconte M. Pérez. « Grâce aux réformes, 500 000 travailleurs sont passés dans le secteur privé, mais il en reste encore un million ! »

Un modèle vient en tête : celui du Vietnam, grand allié politique de Cuba, où le Parti communiste a conservé le pouvoir tout en libéralisant fortement l'économie. « Je crois que nous sommes encore un peu loin de ça, mais (les dirigeants cubains) ont ça en tête », estime l'économiste.

La « leçon » du Vietnam

Le pays asiatique a également été sous embargo américain, mais celui-ci a été levé en 1994.

Le Vietnam « a réussi à surmonter le conflit avec les États-Unis, alors d'un point de vue géopolitique, il y a un enseignement important à reconnaître », souligne M. Pérez.

S'il admet « des parallèles » entre les deux, Ricardo Torres rappelle que le secteur public vietnamien était plus réduit et le pays très rural. « Cuba ressemble plus à l'Europe de l'Est » du bloc soviétique.

Mais lui aussi trouve « une leçon à tirer » de l'expérience du Vietnam : « le dynamisme du secteur privé ». Donc, « si on veut faire croître l'économie et l'emploi, il n'y a pas d'autre solution que de créer un cadre pour que le secteur privé puisse s'épanouir ».

Pour John Kavulich, président du Conseil économique et commercial États-Unis/Cuba, « le Parti communiste vietnamien a reconnu, il y a des années, ce dont il avait besoin pour survivre et il l'a fait ». « Moi et d'autres, cela fait des décennies que nous disons que Cuba imitera le modèle vietnamien, et les dirigeants cubains y ont toujours été réticents. En 2021, c'est exactement le chemin qu'ils prennent ».

Désormais, « l'administration Biden doit croire en la volonté sérieuse de l'administration Diaz-Canel de restructurer l'économie ». Si elle y croit, ce sera « bien plus facile pour Washington de créer des opportunités de rapprochement ».

Miami Herald

Miami, Florida

11 February 2021

Cuba's self-employment expansion leaves key sectors out — including independent journalism

Nora Gámez Torres

A much-anticipated expansion of the private sector in Cuba will not include a wide range of professional services, wholesale trade or major industries like sugar and tobacco and prohibits the creation of media outlets, according to a list of banned activities published Wednesday.



© YAMIL LAGE/AFP/Getty Images North America/TNS In this file photo, a private taxi driver on an old American car wears a face mask as a preventive measure against the spread of the new coronavirus, COVID-19, while driving tourists around Havana, on March 19, 2020.

The government will also not allow competition with the state in other vital sectors such as health care, education and communications, according to the document published by the official website Cubadebate. Although bed and breakfasts are still authorized in the tourism sector, the creation of travel agencies will not be allowed. Most are currently run by companies controlled by the military.

The list comes days after Cuba's government announced it would increase the number of business fields where self employment is allowed from 127 to more than 2,000, a move that generated high expectations that the state-controlled economy was moving toward a major opening.

The expansion of self-employment and small private businesses had been planned since last year as part of a series of reforms to confront the island's economic crisis. Cuba's GDP contracted 11% as the coronavirus pandemic, Trump administration sanctions, and the crisis in Venezuela exacerbated the problems of Cuba's long-beleaguered state economy. The measure also seeks to create jobs for about 300,000 state workers that authorities estimate will be unemployed when the government stops subsidizing inefficient companies.

While praised as an important step, economists noted that the expansion's impact would be limited if small and medium-sized private companies are still not authorized. A law to give these companies legal status was postponed until 2022.

"As positive as this new measure by the Cuban government to expand the list of authorized activities for the self-employed sector may seem, it is still an incomplete measure if it is not accompanied by the legalization of small and medium enterprises in Cuba," said Havana entrepreneur Camilo Condis.

"Small and medium-sized companies would not only solve most of the legal and tax difficulties that the private sector currently faces in Cuba, but they are essential for the recovery and progress of the Cuban economy," he added.

According to the list of barred activities, the government will maintain control of most sectors of the economy. Authorities also prohibit activities until now tolerated, such as creating independent media outlets. Though not formally outlawed under Cuban law, journalists who do not work for state agencies

have been subject to routine harassment.

According to the document, the "editing and layout of books, directories, newsletters, tabloids, newspapers and magazines in any format or medium is prohibited." Printing them is also not allowed.

The Minister of Labor and Social Security, Marta Elena Feitó, said Tuesday that the current list of 127 authorized activities would be eliminated because it was very restrictive. Those who wish to open small businesses will be allowed to present a project related to the more than 2,000 activities listed in the so-called National Classifier of Economic Activities, an official list of all job categories in the country.

The list includes 80 sectors of the economy that are divided in great detail. The agricultural field, for example, is split into different categories of crops, a piecemeal approach that explains why the apparent number of activities is so high.

Among the professional activities that will be authorized are software programming and veterinary medicine, but only for the care of family pets, two long-running demands by Cubans on the island. Many programmers have offered their services to companies abroad but without any legal backing.

The authorization of small veterinary businesses, announced Tuesday by Economy Minister Alejandro Gil, comes after pressure from animal rights activists, who protested a recent decree that banned these services. Economist Carmelo Mesa Lago said that the expansion of self-employment was "a positive step" that many had been advocating for over the years but he cautioned it still remains to be seen what the final regulations say.

"The devil is in the details," he said, recalling how the government announced last year that self-employed workers could export and import products, only for authorities to later say it could only be done through state enterprises.

Some decisions are difficult, he added: "If you allow architects to practice privately, they will leave the state sector."

Architects, engineers, doctors, and scientists are left out of the expansion. So are music and audiovisual producers, who for years have been fighting to get legal status.

Feito said self-employed workers will be able to have more than one business. All currently self-employed workers will have to re-register, she said, and those seeking to open new businesses will have to submit their projects for authorization.

"A country and an economy do not fit into one regulation," said the minister, in reference to the narrow list of 127 authorized activities. Among the changes, she mentioned that those who rent rooms to tourists can now add other services like providing meals and transportation without requiring multiple licenses.

Despite an initial push to reform the economy during Raúl Castro's government, authorities have pushed back on the expansion of self-employment, limiting it to 123 activities that excluded most of the professional services. Some of the allowed activities, such as "button liner" or "palm trimmer" exemplified how limited the focus was.

Even so, thousands of Cubans opened small authorized businesses in their homes: cafes, hostels, "paladares" or restaurants, and beauty parlors. Others left their state jobs to become taxi drivers. The most successful could generate thousands of dollars. For most, the nascent private sector allowed them to survive outside the state economy.

According to government figures, more than 600,000 Cubans are owners or employees in these small businesses.

Although the expansion of authorized private sector activities was a measure that many Cubans have advocated for inside and outside the country, experts believe that it will not be enough to improve the island's economy, which is also experiencing the impact of a monetary reform that has generated inflation. The development of wholesale trade, the elimination of bureaucratic hurdles, and the granting of loans are

other measures that, together with the law recognizing private companies, must be taken "quickly, without obstacles or disincentives," wrote Mesa Lago in a recent report for the Elcano Royal Institute think tank in Spain.

Other experts doubt that the announcement will have an immediate effect on a sector that has been heavily affected by U.S. sanctions and restrictive measures imposed to combat the pandemic. In the announcement, some see a nod to the administration of President Joe Biden, which has promised to review policy toward Cuba and roll back limitations on travel and remittances.

The new U.S. administration could look favorably upon Cuban government efforts to complete the monetary unification that began this year and promote "energizing opportunities for small businesses to operate independently," said John Kavulich, president of the U.S.-Cuba Trade and Economic Council.

"If the Biden administration believes the (Miguel) Diaz-Canel government is prepared to do what is difficult, maintain the processes despite challenges, then is far easier for Washington to create opportunities for engagement," he said.

Halktv Istanbul, Turkey 9 February 2021



Küba'da tarihi adım: Küçük işletmelere izin yayılıyor

Bir süredir ağır ekonomik bunalım içinde olan Küba'da komünist yönetim özel sektöre alan açma kararı aldı. Dükkan gibi küçük işletmelere izin verilecek sektör sayısı 127'den iki bine çıkarıldı.

Geçtiğimiz ağustos ayında İstihdam Bakanı Marta Elena Feito tarafından hazırlanan taslak, cuma günü kabine tarafından kabul edildi. Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılmasından bu yana en ağır ekonomik krizini yaşayan ülkede Devlet Başkanı Miguel Díaz-Canel hükümeti, sadece 124 sektörün devlet kontrolünde kalacağını açıkladı.

BBC Türkçe'nin haberine göre, reform yapılmasından yana olan çok sayıda Kübalı ekonomist, ekonominin canlandırılması ve istihdam yaratılması için uzun zamandır küçük özel işletmelere izin verilmesi gerektiğini söylüyordu.

'Enflasyon kontrol altına alınabilir'

Financial Times'a konuşan Kübalı ekonomist Ricardo Torres, bu sayede istihdamın yaratılacağı ve enflasyonun kontrol altına alınabileceği değerlendirmesini yaoptı. Yine gazeteye açıklamalarda bulunan ABD-Küba Ticaret ve Ekonomi Konseyi Başkanı John Kavulich, Küba'nın para biriminin serbest kalmasını sağlaması ve özel sektörü genişletmesi takdirinde Biden hükümetinin yaptırımları gözden geçirebileceğini söyledi.

Reuters'a konuşan Küba'nın eski merkez bankasında çalışan ekonomisti ve Pontificia Universidad Javeriana Cali adındaki üniversitede akademisyen olan Pavel Vidal, girişimcilerin ilk başta zorluk çekeceğini ancak yavaş yavaş kalkınabileceklerini savundu.

Küba'da yüz binlerce küçük çiftliğin yanı sıra zanaatkarlar, taksi şoförleri ve küçük işletmeler devlet dışı sektörü oluşturuyor. Şimdilik özel sektörde ülkenin çalışan nüfusunun yüzde 13'ü yani 600 bin Kübalı yer alıyor.

Ne olmuştu?

Eski ABD Başkanı Barack Obama tarafından 2015'te başlatılan iki ülke ilişkilerinde normalleşme süreci, 2017'de Trump'ın iktidara gelmesiyle sekteye uğramıştı. Turizm sektörünün koronavirüsle zarar görmesi ve ABD'nin uyguladığı ekonomik yaptırımlarla zorda olan Küba'da para birimi peso birkaç hafta önce değer kaybı yaşamıştı.

Financial Times

London, United Kingdom

7 February 2021

Cuba lifts ban on most private business

Reform comes as communist-ruled island grapples with deepest economic crisis in decades



Cuba's fragile economy was already reeling from a tightening of economic sanctions ordered by the Trump administration © Yander Zamora/EPA/Shutterstock

Marc Frank in Havana

Cuba has announced a big expansion of the private sector as the communist government struggles to deal with the worst economic crisis since the fall of the Soviet Union.

Only weeks after devaluing the peso and scrapping a dual currency system, President Miguel Díaz-Canel's government said over the weekend it would open up most of the economy to private businesses.

Labour Minister Marta Elena Feito Cabrera said that instead of allowing private participation in 127 professions, the government would permit it in more than 2,000, reserving only 124 areas partly or wholly for the state. She did not specify which.

The decision was taken as the Caribbean island confronts rising inflation after the currency devaluation, the first since the 1959 revolution. The government also plans to end subsidies to some state companies, even if that leads to bankruptcies.

Both the monetary reform and the decision to free up the private sector are considered politically risky by analysts. The devaluation has led to increases in the price of most goods, services and utilities, triggering vocal popular complaints despite big rises in state wages and pensions.

Cuba's fragile economy was already reeling from a tightening of economic sanctions ordered by the Trump administration when Covid-19 hit. The pandemic has cut off most tourism revenue, leaving the import-dependent island desperately short of foreign exchange.

The economy shrank by 11 per cent in 2020 after stagnating for years and imports collapsed by a third, leaving creditors empty-handed and Cubans queueing for hours to purchase everyday goods.

The vital tourism industry saw a close to 80 per cent drop in visitors last year. In November the airports reopened, and a trickle of tourists returned, but a surge in Covid-19 cases appears to be undermining hopes of a rebound.

Cuban economist and reform advocate Ricardo Torres said the move to open up the economy would help create jobs and control inflation.

“It gives the authorities a greater margin of freedom to advance in the restructuring of state companies and reduces the discretion of the bureaucracy,” he said.

The Cuban government is hoping that US president Joe Biden will reverse some of the punitive sanctions imposed by the Trump administration — which in its final days designated Cuba a state sponsor of terrorism — and return to Obama-era detente.

John Kavulich, president of the US-Cuba Trade and Economic Council, said that if Havana successfully pushed through exchange rate liberalisation and expanded the private sector, this would create incentives for Washington to engage.

“The key is the Biden administration must believe the Díaz-Canel administration is serious about restructuring the economy,” he said. “The only way to show that seriousness is to endure the pains of transformation.”

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Cuba has grappled with how much space to allow private initiative, severely limiting and regulating it.

Authorities appear to have problems uttering the words “private sector”, which is referred to as the “non-state” sector, and “private businesses” which are referred to as the “self-employed”. State media reports of the ministers meeting referred to the latest measure as the “perfecting of self-employment”.

Only in the last few months have private businesses been granted access to wholesale markets and allowed to import and export, though they must use state companies, and they can now partner with foreign investors. A long-promised law granting them company status and putting their rights on par with other economic actors has yet to materialise.

The non-state sector is composed mainly of small private businesses and co-operatives, their employees, artisans, taxi drivers and tradesmen. In agriculture, there are hundreds of thousands of small farms but they must buy inputs from the state and sell their produce to the state.

The labour minister said there were more than 600,000 people in the private sector, some 13 per cent of the labour force and an estimated 40 per cent of them depended mainly on the tourism industry or worked in public transport.

Pavel Vidal, a former Cuban central bank economist who teaches at Colombia’s Universidad Javeriana Cali, said freeing up private business was key to the success of monetary reform that would force restructuring of state businesses and some bankruptcies.

“The self-employed are not going to have it easy in this new beginning due to the complex environment in which they will operate, with few dollars and inputs in the economy, but they will rise little by little,” he said.

Additional reporting by Michael Stott in London

Miami Herald

Miami, Florida

6 February 2021

Cuban government: Major expansion of small private-sector businesses gets green light

By Mario J. Pentón



Havana residents are again under a lockdown as the government wrestles with a spike in COVID cases. Ramon Espinosa AP

The Cuban government has given a green light to significantly expanding the types of private businesses that can be operated by small, independent entrepreneurs, the state media reported Saturday, a development that comes as the island experiences its worst economic contraction in decades.

Labor and Society Security Minister Marta Elena Feitó said a current list of 127 permitted activities will be expanded to include more than 2,000, the Communist Party newspaper Granma reported. The government said 124 business fields will still be “totally or partially” limited, but no details were provided.

Cuba is going through its most severe economic contraction since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The island nation closed its borders for months last year in an effort to halt contagion during the pandemic, dealing a blow to the tourism sector. The Trump administration rolled back much of former President Barack Obama’s opening, reducing U.S. travel and remittances.

According to official figures, the nation’s economy contracted 11% in 2020. The island has defaulted on its massive foreign debt, drastically reduced imports, and set limits on the number of items that can be purchased in state markets.

Omar Everleny Pérez, an economist on the island, called the move to expand private business positive, though he cautioned more information is needed to know how significant it will be. “Economists have always said it: If the state can’t give what people need, it should at least allow them to look for it on their own,” he said.

There are currently 600,000 self-employed workers, about 13% of the Cuban workforce, the minister reported, adding that the sector had been “severely impacted” by U.S. sanctions and the pandemic. The newspaper called expanding opportunities for small entrepreneurs part of a plan to “perfect” Cuba’s social and economic model and “spark the productive force of this sector.”

The decision was made during a meeting of the Council of Ministers, which includes the president and other high-ranking leaders.

In the midst of the economic crisis, President Miguel Díaz-Canel has embarked on long-delayed reforms, including eliminating the country’s dual currency, opening more to foreign investment and encouraging exports. Last year, the government reopened stores that sell items in dollars, a move that has fueled angst among some Cubans, who say they deepen inequality between those who do and don’t have access to foreign currency.

The Cuban government has long resisted changes to the state-run economy, though Raúl Castro expanded the number of small businesses during his time in the presidency.

President Joe Biden has signaled he intends to undo at least some of the Trump administration's Cuba policy, including loosening restrictions on remittances. But analysts believe he's unlikely to make a complete return to Obama-era engagement. Domestic concerns, the pandemic and pressing issues like migration are widely expected to take precedent over reopening ties with Cuba.

John Kavulich, president of the U.S.-Cuba Trade and Economic Council, said that if the Díaz-Canel administration is seeking to engage the new U.S. president, finishing the currency unification, establishing a consistent floating exchange rate and boosting small businesses could serve as important "carrots."

"The key is the Biden administration must believe the Díaz-Canel administration is serious about restructuring the economy," he said. "The only way to show that seriousness is to endure the pains of transformation."

El Nuevo Herald

Miami, Florida

6 February 2021

Cuba expande el sector privado y elimina la lista de 127 actividades permitidas

por Mario J. Pentón



Cuba desempolva reformas económicas ante crisis por COVID-19

Antonio "Tony" Baró lleva nueve años luchando para sacar adelante su negocio, un restaurante que visitaban muchos turistas para degustar carne de cerdo, arroz y frijoles al estilo cubano. By Associated Press

El gobierno cubano anunció este sábado la eliminación de la lista de 127 actividades que eran permitidas a los pequeños empresarios, que en la isla llaman cuentapropistas. Según anunció el gobierno, ahora se permitirán 2,000 actividades, aunque no dio detalles de cuáles serán.

La medida busca atraer fuerza de trabajo de las empresas estatales subsidiadas, donde están en peligro unos 300,000 puestos de trabajo después de que el gobierno anunciara que dejará de subsidiarlas, según dijo el primer ministro, Manuel Marrero.

La ministra de Trabajo y Seguridad Social, Marta Elena Feitó, dijo que sólo se limitarán "total o parcialmente 124 actividades", de las cuales no dio detalles.

"La lista no incluye actividades consideradas ilícitas para todos los actores económicos o prohibidas expresamente por ley, como la caza y pesca de especies prohibidas y en peligro de extinción, la explotación de las plantas endémicas, el empleo infantil y el trabajo forzado, entre otras", detalla el diario Granma.

La medida era un largo anhelo de los economistas cubanos, pero temida por un sector político que quiere mantener la preeminencia de las empresas estatales, un modelo centralizado heredado de la Unión Soviética.

Omar Everlency Pérez, un economista de la isla, dijo que la medida era positiva, pero que se necesitará

esperar a que den “todos los detalles” para tener una idea del impacto real en la economía.

“Los economistas siempre lo hemos dicho: si el estado no puede dar lo que la gente necesita al menos debería permitir que ellos mismos se lo busquen. Hay que eliminar las trabajas, desatar las fuerzas productivas y esas fuerzas y potencialidades están en el sector privado”, dijo telefónicamente desde La Habana.

John Kavulich, presidente del Consejo Económico y Comercial EEUU-Cuba, con sede en Nueva York, dijo que hay dos procesos que Díaz-Canel puede utilizar como “zanahorias” para impulsar un acercamiento con la administración Biden: “completar la unificación de las monedas y establecer un tipo de cambio flotante consistente y, segundo, impulsar las oportunidades para que las pequeñas empresas operen de forma independiente”.

“Si la administración Biden cree que Díaz-Canel está preparado para hacer lo que es difícil, mantener los procesos a pesar de los desafíos, entonces será mucho más fácil para Washington crear oportunidades de participación”, añadió el experto.

El gobierno cubano ha dado muchas señales de querer retomar un diálogo con Estados Unidos y ha pedido que Biden elimine las sanciones de la administración Trump, entre ellas la inclusión en la lista de países patrocinadores del terrorismo.

Washington ha dicho que considera el respeto a los derechos humanos un eje en su política hacia Cuba y que está revisando las políticas de la administración anterior.

Cuba atraviesa una severa crisis económica que derrumbó el PIB en un 11 por ciento en 2020, de acuerdo a cifras oficiales. La pandemia de coronavirus; la debacle de su aliado y benefactor, el régimen de Nicolás Maduro; las sanciones de Estados Unidos y la propia ineficiencia de las empresas cubanas han puesto en aprietos las finanzas públicas.

La isla ha dejado de pagar su abultada deuda externa, reducido drásticamente las importaciones y establecido límites en la cantidad de artículos que pueden comprarse en los desabastecidos mercados estatales.

Como resultado de la crisis, el gobierno de Miguel Díaz-Canel ha apresurado las reformas prometidas hace más de una década, eliminando la dualidad monetaria, abriendo aún más el país a la inversión extranjera y fomentando la exportación. Sin embargo, los cambios económicos no han resultado en cambios sociales. La represión contra disidentes y la prensa independiente continua.

El sector privado, que durante décadas fue duramente reprimido por el marxismo ortodoxo de Fidel Castro, emplea a más de 600,000 cubanos, el 13 por ciento de la fuerza laboral del país y de acuerdo con datos de economistas es mucho más rentable y eficiente que las empresas estatales y militares.

Raúl Castro, quien heredó la presidencia de su hermano en 2008, permitió las pequeñas empresas en el marco de una serie de reformas que permitieran la sostenibilidad del régimen.

Los trabajadores privados esperan aún que se legalicen las pequeñas y medianas empresas y que el país permita su expansión, a lo que los jerarcas del Partido Comunista se han opuesto sistemáticamente.

Radio Television Marti

Washington DC

4 February 2021

Estados Unidos
Michelle Sagué

Departamento de Estado nombra nuevos encargados de asuntos cubanos



Emily Mendrala y Julie Chung.

La exdirectora ejecutiva del Centro para la Democracia en las Américas, **Emily Mendrala**, fue nombrada este miércoles **subsecretaria adjunta en la Oficina de Asuntos del Hemisferio Occidental**, encargada de Cuba y la inmigración regional.

Mendrala ocupará el puesto que desde mediados de 2019 pertenecía a **Carrie Filipetti**, quien atendía los temas de Cuba y Venezuela.

En el Centro para la Democracia en las Américas, desde el 2017, Mendrala dirigió delegaciones de viajes educativos para miembros del Congreso, líderes políticos y otras partes interesadas a Cuba, América Central y la frontera entre Estados Unidos y México, según señala la página web del Departamento de Estado.

También sirvió como directora de Asuntos Legislativos del Consejo Nacional de Seguridad y asesora especial de la coordinadora de Asuntos Cubanos y, antes de eso, fue asesora para asuntos de Centroamérica. Mendrala fue parte de la delegación que acompañó al presidente Barack Obama en su viaje oficial a La Habana, en marzo de 2016.

“Emily trae una perspectiva histórica que será útil porque ella puede apreciar qué funcionó durante la administración Obama y que falló”, dijo a Radio Martí John Kavulich, presidente del Consejo Económico y Comercial EEUU-Cuba, una entidad privada que monitorea las relaciones económicas bilaterales.

En otro cambio la cancillería estadounidense, **Julie Chung** se desempeñará como subsecretaria interina en la Oficina de Asuntos del Hemisferio Occidental, en sustitución de **Michael Kozak**.

"El objetivo principal de la administración Biden-Harris es apoyar una transición democrática y pacífica en Venezuela a través de elecciones presidenciales y parlamentarias libres y justas; y ayudar al pueblo venezolano a reconstruir sus vidas y su país". - [@StateDeptSPOX pic.twitter.com/aA0wKI60Pp](https://twitter.com/StateDeptSPOX/pic.twitter.com/aA0wKI60Pp)
— Julie Chung (@WHAAsstSecty) [February 4, 2021](#)

Chung ocupaba antes, desde noviembre de 2018, el cargo de Subsecretaria Adjunta Principal en la Oficina de Asuntos del Hemisferio Occidental. Anteriormente fue directora para Japón en la Oficina de Asuntos de Asia Oriental y el Pacífico, y se desempeñó como Subsecretaria Adjunta interina de febrero a septiembre de 2018.

También fue Consejera Política Adjunta en Bogotá, donde dirigió el programa de extradición más grande del gobierno de los Estados Unidos, incluidos los casos de paramilitares y narcotráfico.

Los cambios se anunciaron cuando se espera que la administración del presidente **Joe Biden** revise la política de Estados Unidos hacia Cuba.

"La política hacia Cuba se rige por dos principios. En primer lugar, el apoyo a la democracia y los derechos humanos, que será el núcleo de los esfuerzos. En segundo lugar, los estadounidenses, especialmente los cubanoamericanos, son los mejores embajadores de la libertad en Cuba. Así que revisaremos las políticas de la administración Trump", dijo el pasado 28 de enero la secretaria de prensa de la Casa Blanca, Jen Psaki, en su conferencia de prensa diaria.

Kozak y Filipetti, en sus respectivos cargos, ayudaron a implementar la política del expresidente Trump, quien tomó medidas drásticas contra Cuba después de asumir el cargo en 2017, poniendo fin a la política de acercamiento con el régimen de La Habana del presidente Barack Obama. Trump endureció las restricciones sobre los viajes y las remesas de Estados Unidos a Cuba e impuso sanciones a los envíos de petróleo venezolano a la isla, entre otras medidas.

Deutsche Welle

Bonn, Germany

20 January 2021

What Latin America can expect from Joe Biden

What plans does the incoming US president have for relationships with the region?

As vice president, Joe Biden, seen here speaking in Mexico in 2013, often visited Latin American countries. Two out of three Latino votes went to Joe Biden in the presidential election. This is not the only reason why expectations of Joe Biden are high, however. As Barack Obama's vice president, Biden was the main emissary to Latin America, and in the early days of the US presidential campaign he made it clear that he wanted to focus more attention on Latin American policy.

Above all, experts expect him to take a more cooperative approach than Donald Trump: "He will be far more invested in the region's prosperity and its capacity to confront challenges ranging from organized crime to natural disasters," writes Michael Camilleri of The Dialogue, a Washington-based think tank.

Biden has appointed Juan Sebastian Gonzalez, a native Colombian, as his national security adviser for the Western Hemisphere. Together, they will have their hands full addressing the region's problems. The following are the most important issues:

Control migration

Ostensibly, migration is certainly the Latin American issue on which the outgoing and incoming presidents differ most clearly. Trump would have preferred to stop all immigration to the US, while Biden promises to give the so-called Dreamers — people who immigrated illegally as children — the opportunity to become US citizens.

But for the US, the greater problem by far lies south of the border with Mexico, where millions and millions of people dream of a better future in the north. And anyone expecting Biden to roll out the red carpet for them is mistaken. Two Biden advisers made that clear in a written interview with Spain's EFE news agency at the end of December: "The migrants and asylum seekers should in no way believe that the border will suddenly open." Biden does, however, plan to process asylum cases more quickly and allow more applicants into the US than in the Trump era.

The new administration also plans to do more to fight the root causes of mass migration by earmarking 4 billion US dollars for efforts to help Latin American countries fight poverty and crime within their own borders. The funds will go to specific projects and be made conditional on an adherence to recognized legal standards.

Aid for Latin America

In addition to Mexico, the focus will be on the region's so-called "Northern Triangle," comprising Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras. This involves several political challenges, according to Stanford University's Harold Trinkunas. "The Guatemala government has shut up the UN-backed anti-corruption commission CICIG, the government in El Salvador is acting more and more authoritarian and the president of Honduras is allegedly connected to international drug trafficking," he said.

The situation in Mexico will also be no walk in the park. President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador's non-confrontational approach to dealing with drug cartels, whose excesses of violence have forced countless Mexicans to flee their homes for fear of losing their lives, has been anything but successful, according to Shannon O'Neil from the Council on Foreign Relations, in a podcast interview with the US magazine *America's Quarterly*. In addition to this, a new law in Mexico also makes it harder for the two countries to work together on security issues, he says.

Mexican cities are often hit by drug cartel violence, as here in Culiacan in 2019

Stanford University's Trinkunas is also skeptical as to whether Biden's immigration strategy will work, especially after similar efforts under Barack Obama failed. "Biden had a similar approach as vice president, and I don't see new ideas here that would raise hopes," he said.

Overcoming Covid-19

The most urgent problem at present continues to be the coronavirus pandemic — both the medical toll it has taken on the region and the devastating effect it has had on global trade and on the already weak economies of many countries in the region.

More economic support for the region from the US is not expected. What is likely, however, is help when it comes to distributing vaccines.

According to Trinkunas, the US government is interested in two things: "There is an overall sense that Latin America is still an important trading partner. Also, concerns that a prolonged health crisis in the South could drive even more people north might play a role here."

Chuck Call, an expert on Latin America at the American University in Washington, DC, added that there's also the matter of Washington's soft-power rivalry with China and Russia, as both countries are offering to provide the region with vaccines.

Facing up to China

Biden views China's growing influence in Central and South America as a danger to America's national security and has criticized the Trump administration for failing to confront it properly. But here, he seems to be ignoring the fact that this development has been gaining momentum over the last 10 years and that he himself, as vice president under Obama, did little to slow it down, either.

Currently, Mexico is the only large country in the region with strong economic ties to the United States. For the rest of the region, China is the biggest trading partner — with many countries being completely dependent on Beijing economically. Ecuador, for example, exports nearly 100% of its oil to China.

China could now use this power, just like in Africa, to sway votes within the United Nations in its interests, according to Call. But America doesn't just have to stand by and allow this to happen, he said. "Donald Trump has shown that the US still has some leverage, for example by imposing trade restrictions," Call said. In addition to this, Call said, the West should work together through the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to counter China's investments in the infrastructure of the region.

Venezuela, a US foreign policy conundrum for decades, is isolated, its fleeing masses putting pressure on the whole region

What to do with Venezuela?

Desperation, widespread crime and terrorist acts by armed militias loyal to the government have forced millions of people to flee Venezuela. Although the majority of asylum seekers seek refuge in neighboring countries, the effects are still felt in the United States. And then there is the drug trade in the Andean region, which the US believes uses Venezuela as a transit country to the north with the direct support of the government there.

Biden, like leaders of other Western countries, hopes to see democracy reinstated in Venezuela. The only question many are asking is, how? During the administration of George W. Bush, Washington slapped sanctions on members of the government of President Hugo Chavez over their involvement in the international drug trade. Additional sanctions were issued during the Obama administration for human rights abuses. And the Trump administration issued further sanctions against the country's state-owned oil company, PdVSA.

In addition to this, both the US and the EU supported the country's political opposition, and not just by recognizing the former parliamentary speaker, Juan Guaido, as the country's interim leader. "We have tried a lot, but nothing has worked," according to Chuck Call, who concludes, with some resignation: "Actually, there are no easy answers."

Normalization of relations with Cuba

Many observers were optimistic about efforts during the Obama administration to improve relations with Cuba. Cubans living in exile in Florida didn't all welcome them, however, with the majority of them voting for Trump in the last election.

Trump was quick to turn back the clock on normal relations with Cuba when he took office in 2017 and just recently, before leaving office, he made sure to return Cuba to the list of countries that officially support terrorism.

President Biden is going to have no easy task continuing with efforts to improve relations that were capped in early 2017, according to John Kavulich, the president of the US-Cuba Trade and Economic Council, because Trump had partly justified his move by citing Cuba's connections with Venezuela. Kavulich told British broadcaster BBC that the US Congress might well even move more toward adding Venezuela to the list of countries that support terrorism rather than removing Cuba from that same list.

This article was adapted from German.

Blickpunkt Lateinamerika

Essen, Germany

19 January 2021

Erwartungen an die Kuba-Politik von Joe Biden

Autor: Andreas Knobloch

Mit der Amtseinführung von Joe Biden hoffen viele Kubaner auf eine Verbesserung der Beziehungen zwischen den USA und Kuba. Doch der neue Präsident übernimmt ein schwieriges Erbe von der Trump-Administration. Gefragt ist eine Politik der pragmatischen Schritte.



Joe Biden am 9. August 2019 in Iowa. Morgen wird er als neuer Präsident der USA in Washington vereidigt. Foto: Joe Biden, Gage Skidmore, CC BY-SA 4.0

Es sind zwei Aktionen mit großer Symbolkraft. Am 12. Januar 2017, wenige Tage vor der Machtübergabe an seinen Nachfolger Donald Trump, hob US-Präsident Barack Obama mit einer seiner letzten Amtsentscheidungen die sogenannte „Wet foot, dry foot“-Politik auf, die Vorzugsbehandlung kubanischer Einwanderer, nach der diese bei der Einreise in die USA dauerhaftes Bleiberecht erhielten. Der kubanischen Regierung hatte wiederholt die Beendigung dieser speziell für Kubaner geltenden US-Einwanderungsbestimmung gefordert, die dafür sorgte, dass im Laufe der Jahrzehnte Hunderttausende Kubaner versuchten, auf zusammengengelagerten Booten und Flößen über die Meerenge nach Florida zu gelangen.

Trumps Kehrtwende in der Kuba-Politik

In der vergangenen Woche nun, am 11. Januar 2021, verkündete die Trump-Administration ihrerseits in einer ihrer letzten Amtshandlungen mit scheinheiligen Argumenten die Wiederaufnahme Kubas in die Liste der Länder, die Terrorismus fördern. Auf der US-Terrorliste stehen neben Kuba nur Nordkorea, der Iran und Syrien. Für die betroffenen Länder gelten Einschränkungen bei der US-Entwicklungshilfe, Rüstungsexporten und bestimmten finanziellen Transaktionen. Kuba war 2015 von Obama während der Wiederaufnahme der diplomatischen Beziehungen beider Länder von der Terrorliste gestrichen worden. In einem aufsehenerregenden Schritt hatte Obama Ende 2014 eine Neuausrichtung der US-Kuba-Politik verkündet und dies mit dem Scheitern der US-amerikanischen Blockadepolitik begründet. „Wir können nicht weiterhin dasselbe machen und ein anderes Resultat erwarten“, so Obama damals.

Sein Amtsnachfolger Donald Trump dagegen ist in den vier Jahren seiner Amtszeit zum Kalten Krieg zurückgekehrt: Diplomaten wurden abgezogen, neue Reisebeschränkungen erlassen, Flug- und Kreuzfahrtschiffsrouten eingestellt, Geldüberweisungen erschwert. Als erster US-Präsident überhaupt ermöglichte Trump Klagen nach Titel III des sogenannten Helms-Burton-Gesetzes, einer 1996 erlassenen Verschärfung der US-Blockade gegen Kuba. Besagte Klausel war bisher von allen US-Präsidenten in Sechs-Monats-Schritten suspendiert worden. Donald Trump aktivierte sie Anfang 2019 und ebnete somit den Weg für Schadensersatzklagen vor US-Gerichten gegen Unternehmen, die nach der Revolution verstaatlichten Besitz „nutzen“. Die Aufnahme in die Terrorliste ist der Höhepunkt einer kontinuierlichen Eskalation.

Biden kündigt Annäherung an Kuba an

„Für US-Unternehmen wird die Rückkehr Kubas auf die Liste der staatlichen Sponsoren des Terrorismus ein weiterer unter vielen negativen Anreizen sein, nach Geschäftsmöglichkeiten mit Kuba zu suchen“, sagt John S. Kavulich, Präsident des in New York ansässigen US-Cuba Trade and Economic Council gegenüber Blickpunkt Lateinamerika. „Die Trump-Administration wollte die verbliebene Flamme löschen, die von US-Unternehmen für ein erneutes Engagement mit Kuba aufrechterhalten wurde. Das US-Außenministerium hat nun einen Eimer Wasser darüber geschüttet.“

„Natürlich ist es ein Hindernis – nur deswegen hat Trump es gemacht“, sagt Kuba-Experte Bert Hoffmann vom GIGA-Institut in Hamburg. Biden hatte im Wahlkampf angekündigt, dass seine Regierung die von Obama angestoßene Annäherungspolitik zu Kuba wieder aufnehmen werde. Die Beseitigung der Sanktionen könnte sich für die Regierung des Demokraten Joe Biden komplex gestalten. „Anstatt mit dem Hick-Hack darum, Havanna wieder von dieser Liste zu bekommen, würde Biden seine Kuba-Politik sicherlich lieber mit Maßnahmen beginnen, in denen auch die kubano-amerikanische Community gespalten ist – etwa, die Geldsendungen an Verwandte auf der Insel wieder zu erleichtern“, so Hoffmann.

„Kuba ist in den USA immer auch Innenpolitik. In zwei Jahren sind in Florida Gouverneurs- und Midterm-Kongresswahlen. Die Republikaner werden jede Gelegenheit nutzen, um Biden als 'soft on Cuba' darzustellen.“ Obama habe zwar gezeigt, dass man auch mit einer Entspannungspolitik gegenüber Havanna Florida gewinnen kann: Dies zu wiederholen, sei nach den politischen Verwerfungen von vier Jahren Trump allerdings schwieriger geworden, glaubt Hoffmann.

Experten erwarten pragmatische Entscheidungen

Aus Sicht der Demokraten sollten Entscheidungen im Zusammenhang mit Kuba also nicht allzu verstörende Auswirkungen auf die Wählerschaft in Florida haben. Auch wird die Kuba-Politik der neuen Regierung stark vom Politikansatz gegenüber Venezuela abhängen. „Die Trump-Administration hat Kuba und Venezuela erfolgreich verbunden, und die Biden-Administration muss sie trennen, bevor sie sich erneut mit Kuba befasst“, sagt Kavulich. Angesicht zahlreicher kubanisch-stämmiger Abgeordneter in beiden Kongresskammern hält er dies für eine schwere Aufgabe.

Die Hoffnung vieler Kubaner auf der Insel, Biden werde nahtlos an die Entspannungspolitik Obamas anknüpfen, dürfte sich also nicht so ohne Weiteres erfüllen. Hoffmann glaubt, dass Biden vorsichtig agieren wird. „Kuba wird kaum die Priorität und die Aufmerksamkeit bekommen, die es in der zweiten Amtszeit Obamas hatte. Spektakuläre Gesten wie Obamas Besuch in Havanna sind nicht zu erwarten, aber zu hoffen ist auf eine niedrigschwellige Entspannungspolitik pragmatischer Schritte.“ Dazu zählen die Erleichterung von Geldüberweisungen nach Kuba, die Aufhebung diverser Reisebeschränkungen für US-Amerikaner, Handelserleichterungen und, „dass die US-Botschaft in Havanna wieder normal besetzt wird, dass die Visa-

Abteilung wieder ihre Routine-Arbeit aufnimmt – vieles an zwischenstaatlichen Selbstverständlichkeiten, die Trump gezielt torpediert hat“, sagt Hoffmann. „Bei Trump gab es nur eine Richtung – Verschärfung. Mit Biden diskutieren wir immerhin wieder, inwieweit Entspannung in den Beziehungen möglich wird.“

Financial Times

London, United Kingdom

18 January 2021

Biden rapprochement with Cuba faces difficult hurdles **Havana's reluctance to make concessions and US electoral politics complicate detente**



Cuba's citizens, currently mired in the worst economic crisis since the fall of the Soviet Union, are pinning their hopes on US president-elect Joe Biden © AFP via Getty Images

Marc Frank in Havana and Michael Stott in London

Battered by their worst economic crisis in decades, ordinary Cubans are hoping that US president-elect Joe Biden will bring them better times, remembering his role in Barack Obama's administration which eased sanctions and restored full diplomatic relations.

But last week move's by the outgoing Trump administration to designate Cuba a state sponsor of terrorism has thrown another obstacle along what already promised to be a long and difficult path towards rapprochement.

Mike Pompeo, in his final few days as US secretary of state, accused Havana of aiding murderers, bombmakers and hijackers when announcing the designation, triggering a furious reaction from Cuba. The other countries labelled by the US as state sponsors of terrorism are Syria, North Korea and Iran.

The US decision was the result of an inter-agency process and typically takes several months, meaning it cannot be swiftly reversed. Other hurdles to better relations include unhelpful domestic politics in both countries, Cuba's solid backing for Nicolás Maduro's regime in Venezuela and a continuing row over the sickness of US diplomats stationed in Havana.

“It will be difficult for even a more modest Biden-led detente to advance meaningfully without greater reciprocity from Cuba,” Nicholas Watson of consultancy Teneo wrote in a note to clients. Cuba's long-suffering citizens, currently mired in their worst economic crisis since the fall of the Soviet Union, are nonetheless pinning their hopes on Mr Biden.

Speaking from her modest home in a small town in the foothills of the Sierra Maestra mountains of eastern Cuba, Kety Pulgar, 45, said Mr Biden would “do things Trump did not want to do”.

“Everyone is waiting to see how things develop, but we think they'll be positive because of his links to Obama,” she told the Financial Times. “The people look favourably, not unfavourably on him.”

Rolando Matos, who runs a burger restaurant in Havana, said small businesses such as his enjoyed a boom during Mr Obama's presidency as US tourists began visiting Cuba. This ended when Mr Trump blocked travel to the island. “Undoubtedly, having a Democratic president and follower of Obama will be very favourable for Cuba and businesses are hoping to recover,” Mr Matos said.

Such optimism may be premature. In the first months of the Biden administration, incremental steps to improve relations are more likely than a major thaw, say experts.

Joe Garcia, a former Democratic congressman from Miami who recently made an exploratory trip to the island, said of the Cuban government: “They think happy days are here again. I tried to disabuse them of the idea that it all goes back now to Obama 2.0.”

Mr Garcia said he expected the Biden administration to first focus on scrapping limits imposed by the Trump administration of \$1,000 per quarter on remittances, dismantling a few travel restrictions and lifting a ban on US flights to Cuban airports outside Havana.

John Kavulich, president of the US-Cuba Trade and Economic Council, said resolving the crisis in Venezuela was far more important to Mr Biden. “As for adding unfettered visits to help the Cuban tourism industry . . . why would Biden choose to remove that leverage?”

Officials in Mr Biden’s transition team declined to comment on Cuba policies, saying they could only speak after the January 20 presidential inauguration.

The Havana government has so far been cautious. Miguel Díaz-Canel, Cuban president, did not congratulate Mr Biden or mention his name in public after the US election. Cuba is in the throes of a delicate political transition to a younger generation, with Raúl Castro, the former president who leads the Communist party, due to step down in April.

In his year-end address to the nation, Mr Diaz-Canel said it was possible to build a “respectful and lasting relationship” with the US but added: “What we are not willing to negotiate and what we will not give in one iota is the revolution, socialism and our sovereignty.”

Carlos Alzugaray, a retired Cuban diplomat, said Havana was ready to return to the detente blown up by Mr Trump but added: “They expect reason to prevail on the other side.”

This, US experts say, is a problem: Cuban officials see their country as a victim of unfair measures and do not believe they need to take steps themselves to improve relations.

Further complicating matters is the unresolved issue of sickness among US and Canadian diplomats in Havana in 2016-17, leading to reductions in staff and the US closing most consular services. A US government report found the most likely cause was directed microwave radiation.

But perhaps the biggest obstacle is US electoral politics. Mr Trump’s hard line against Cuba and Venezuela proved popular among Latino voters in Florida, helping the Republicans win the state by a bigger margin than in 2016.

Influential Florida Republican Marco Rubio, one of three Cuban-Americans in the US Senate, has already warned against relaxing US sanctions on Cuba, citing a recent crackdown by Havana on dissidents.

“We can already see how the Cuban regime responds when it thinks relief may be on the way,” Mr Rubio wrote in the Miami Herald last month. “More innocent Cubans will pay the price if we return to a one-sided Cuba policy — and throw a lifeline to Raúl Castro’s dictatorial regime.”

Deutsche Welle

Bonn, Germany

16 January 2021

US-Außenpolitik

Lateinamerika: Ist Joe Biden ein Präsident für den ganzen Kontinent?

Viele US-Latinos haben Joe Biden gewählt. Doch wie steht der künftige US-Präsident zu ihren Herkunftsländern? Kann er sie politisch und ökonomisch stärken und an die USA binden? Ein Überblick über die wichtigsten Themen.



Als Vizepräsident unter Barack Obama hat Joe Biden 16 Staatsbesuche in Lateinamerika absolviert. Hier spricht er in Mexiko (Archiv)

Zwei von drei Stimmen lateinamerikastämmiger Wähler gingen bei der Präsidentenwahl an Joe Biden. Doch nicht nur deshalb sind die Erwartungen an Joe Biden groß: Als Vizepräsident von Barack Obama war Biden dessen Mann für Lateinamerika, und schon zu Beginn des US-Präsidentschaftswahlkampfes hatte er deutlich gemacht, dass er der Lateinamerikapolitik wieder mehr Aufmerksamkeit schenken wolle. Experten erwarten von ihm vor allem einen kooperativeren Ansatz als den von Donald Trump: "Er wird sich wesentlich mehr für den Wohlstand der Region und ihre Fähigkeit engagieren, Probleme - wie Naturkatastrophen und das organisierte Verbrechen - selbst anzugehen", schreibt Michael Camilleri vom Washingtoner Think-Tank "The Dialogue".

Kampf um Latino-Stimmen in Florida

Nun hat Joe Biden mit Juan Sebastián González einen gebürtigen Kolumbianer zu seinem "Nationalen Sicherheitsberater für die Westliche Hemisphäre" ernannt. Gemeinsam werden sie alle Hände voll zu tun haben, die Probleme der Region anzugehen. Dies sind nur einige der wichtigsten:

Migration kontrollieren

Zumindest vordergründig ist die Migration sicher das Lateinamerika-Thema, in dem sich der scheidende und der kommende Präsident am deutlichsten unterscheiden: Hier Donald Trump, der am liebsten jegliche Immigration in die USA unterbunden hätte, dort Joe Biden, der verspricht, sogenannten Dreamern - illegal als Kinder eingewanderte Menschen - die Möglichkeit zu geben, die US-Staatsbürgerschaft anzunehmen.



2018 machte die "Karawane" von Migranten Schlagzeilen, die aus Mittelamerika Richtung USA wanderte. Doch das weit größere Problem für die USA wartet weiterhin südlich der Grenze zu Mexiko, wo Abermillionen von Menschen von einer besseren Zukunft im Norden träumen. Wer erwartet, dass Joe Biden ihnen den roten Teppich ausrollt, irrt. Das machten zwei seiner Berater Ende Dezember in einem schriftlichen Interview mit der spanischen Nachrichtenagentur EFE klar: "Die Migranten und Asylsuchenden sollten keinesfalls glauben, dass sich die Grenze plötzlich öffnet." Allerdings will Biden die Asylverfahren schneller abwickeln und mehr Antragsteller in USA lassen, als das unter Donald Trump geschah.

Zusätzlich will die kommende Regierung eher dem Motto "Fluchtursachen bekämpfen" folgen. Insgesamt vier Milliarden US-Dollar hat Joe Biden vorgesehen, um Regierungen in Mittelamerika zu helfen, Armut und Gewalt in den Griff zu bekommen. Die Hilfen sollen zielgerichtet ausgegeben werden und an rechtsstaatliche Standards geknüpft sein.

Geld für Mittelamerika

Neben Mexiko hat Biden das "Nördliche Dreieck" - Guatemala, El Salvador und Honduras - mehrfach in den Fokus gerückt. In welches Dilemma seine Politik hier gerät, resümiert Harold Trinkunas von der US-Universität Stanford: "Die Regierung in Guatemala hat die UN-unterstützte Kommission gegen Korruption abgesetzt, die Regierung El Salvadors regiert zusehends autoritärer und der Präsident von Honduras wird beschuldigt, sich am internationalen Drogenhandel zu beteiligen."



Im Oktober 2019 zeugen Rauchschwaden über der mexikanischen Stadt Culiacan vom Terror der Drogenkartelle

Auch die Zusammenarbeit mit Mexiko dürfte nicht einfacher werden. Die "Umarmen-statt-Schießen-Politik" von Präsident Andrés Manuel López Obrador gegenüber den Drogenkartellen, deren Gewaltexzesse zahllose Mexikaner aus ihrer Heimat vertrieben haben, habe nicht gefruchtet, erklärt Shannon O'Neil vom US-Think-Tank Council on Foreign Relations im Podcast-Interview mit dem US-Magazin America's Quarterly. Zudem erschwere ein neues Gesetz in Mexiko die Sicherheits-Zusammenarbeit mit den USA.

Auch Stanford-Forscher Trinkunas sehr skeptisch, dass Bidens Migrationsstrategie aufgeht - insbesondere, nachdem ein ähnlicher Ansatz bereits unter Barack Obama fehlgeschlagen ist: "Ich sehe hier keine neuen Ideen, die wirklich Hoffnung machen würden."

COVID-19 überwinden

Das aktuell drängendste Problem ist wohl die Corona-Krise. Nicht nur die Krankheit selbst, auch die Gegenmaßnahmen vieler Regierungen und der geschwächte Welthandel haben die ohnehin taumelnde Wirtschaft vieler Länder zu Boden geschickt.



Ein größeres US-Konjunkturprogramm für die Region wird es sicher nicht geben, wohl aber medizinische Hilfe - insbesondere bei der Verteilung von Impfstoffen. Dabei gehe es den USA vor allem um zwei Dinge, meint Trinkunas: "Die USA betrachten Lateinamerika immer noch als wichtigen Handelspartner, außerdem könnte eine anhaltende Gesundheitskrise im Süden noch mehr Menschen Richtung Norden treiben."

Chuck Call, Lateinamerika-Experte der American University (AU) in Washington D.C., stellt noch einen weiteren Punkt heraus: "Hier geht es auch um eine Soft-Power-Rivalität mit China und Russland." Beide Staaten haben bereits angekündigt, Impfstoff zu liefern.

China die Stirn bieten

Den wachsenden Einfluss Chinas in Mittel- und Südamerika hat Joe Biden als Gefahr für die nationale Sicherheit bezeichnet. Den Grund dafür sieht er in einem Mangel an Führungsstärke der scheidenden Regierung. Was er dabei geflissentlich übersieht: Die Entwicklung hat bereits vor zehn Jahren eine enorme Dynamik entfaltet. Und auch während Bidens Vizepräsidentschaft taten die USA wenig, um sie zu bremsen. Mittlerweile ist Mexiko das einzige große Land der Region, dass wirtschaftlich noch wirklich eng an die USA gebunden ist. Für den Rest der Region als Ganzes ist China der wichtigste Handelspartner. In einzelnen Ländern hängen die Staatsfinanzen massiv von Chinas Nachfrage ab. Ecuador etwa verkauft nahezu 100 Prozent seiner Ölexporte nach China.



Dieser chinesische Zug verkehrt seit 2019 zwischen Kubas Hauptstadt und Guantánamo

Diese Macht könnte China, ähnlich wie in Afrika, nutzen, um Abstimmungen in UN-Gremien zu seinen Gunsten zu beeinflussen, deutet Experte Call an. Doch dem müsse man nicht tatenlos zusehen: "Donald Trump hat mit Handelsrestriktionen gezeigt, dass die USA weiterhin Einfluss nehmen kann." Außerdem sollte der Westen nach Calls Ansicht multi-laterale Finanzierungen - zum Beispiel vom Internationalen Währungsfonds und der Weltbank - nutzen, um Chinas Investitionen in die Infrastruktur der Region zu kontern.

Mit Venezuela umgehen

Perspektivlosigkeit, grassierende Kriminalität und Terror durch regierungstreue Schlägerbanden haben Millionen von Venezolanern aus dem Land getrieben. Die Migranten suchen zwar mehrheitlich Asyl bei den südamerikanischen Nachbarn, die Auswirkungen sind aber auch in den USA zu spüren. Hinzu kommt der Drogenhandel, der nach US-Auffassung unter direkter Beteiligung der Regierung aus den Andenländern über Venezuela Richtung Norden läuft.



Machtlos in Venezuela: Trotz westlicher Unterstützung für die Opposition unter Interimspräsident sitzt Nicolás Maduro fest im Sattel

Wie der gesamte Westen hat Joe Biden zum Ziel erklärt, die Demokratie in Venezuela wiederherzustellen. Die Frage ist nur: Wie? Schon unter George Bush haben die USA Mitglieder der damaligen Regierung von Präsident Hugo Chávez mit Sanktionen wegen Beteiligung am internationalen Drogenhandel belegt. Unter Barack Obama kamen Sanktionen wegen Verletzung der demokratischen Ordnung und der Menschenrechte hinzu. Donald Trump hat weitere Wirtschaftssanktionen gegen die Regierung einschließlich der staatlichen Ölgesellschaft PdVSA erhoben. Und - wie die EU - haben auch die USA die Opposition unterstützt - nicht nur, indem sie Parlamentspräsident Juan Guaidó als Interimspräsidenten anerkannt haben. "Wir haben vieles versucht, gewirkt hat eigentlich nichts", sagt Chuck Call und fügt resigniert hinzu: "Einfache Antworten gibt es jedenfalls nicht."

Normalisierung mit Kuba

Die Annäherung an Kuba unter Barack Obama galt vielen Beobachtern als vielversprechend. Unter Exilkubanern dagegen waren sie sehr umstritten, in Florida stimmten sie mehrheitlich für Donald Trump. Der hatte einen Teil der "Normalisierung" schon zu Beginn seiner Präsidentschaft rückgängig gemacht, wenige Tage vor Ende seiner Amtszeit hat er das Land zurück auf die Liste der Terrorunterstützer gesetzt. Damit dürfte Biden es schwer haben, dort anzuknüpfen, wo die demokratische Regierung 2017 aufgehört hat, sagte John Kavulich, Präsident des "U.S.-Cuba Trade and Economic Council" der BBC, weil Trump als Grund unter anderem Kubas Verbindungen zu Venezuela angeführt habe: Aus dem Kongress könne daher sogar eher die Forderung kommen, auch Venezuela auf diese Liste zu setzen, als Kuba davon zu streichen, meint Kavulich.

13 January 2021

キューバ、テロ国家再指定 バイデン氏を牽制か トランプ政権

会員記事

2021年1月13日 5時00分

トランプ米政権は11日、キューバをテロ支援国家に再指定したと発表した。バイデン次期政権の発足が20日に迫るなか、2015年に33年ぶりに解除したオバマ前政権の歴史的判断を覆した。オバマ政権で副大統領を務めたバイデン氏が融和路線に戻るのを牽制（けんせい）するとともに、キューバ政府に対して反感を抱くキューバ系米国人の共和党支持を固める狙いとみられる。

ポンペオ国務長官は再指定した理由について、11日に出した声明で、キューバ政府が▽19年1月に南米コロンビアで爆弾テロを実行した左翼ゲリラ「民族解放軍」の幹部引き渡しを拒否した▽ベネズエラのマドゥロ政権を支援している、などと説明。キューバ政府は「国際テロ行為を繰り返し支援している」「（ベネズエラで）国際テロリストが増える環境をつくった」と主張した。

だが、米ニューヨーク・タイムズによると、再指定は国務省のテロ対策部門ではなく、北米と中南米を担当する西半球部門が主導したという。同紙は再指定にあたって、キューバ政府がテロに関わった直接的な証拠は示されておらず、大統領選で与野党が接戦となるフロリダ州のキューバ系住民らに向けた「政治的動機が大きい」とのキューバ専門家の見方を伝えた。在米キューバ系には社会主義政権を嫌って、米国に亡命した人々が多いためだ。

現在、米政府がテロ支援国家に指定しているのは、キューバのほかは、北朝鮮、イラン、シリアだ。指定すると、米国の経済援助は制限され、武器輸出は禁じられる。

キューバについては、米国は82年に指定したが、オバマ前政権は国際社会で孤立させる政策は「時代遅れ」として、15年5月に解除した。同7月には54年ぶりに国交を回復させ、キューバ革命以来、半世紀以上対立してきた両国関係は大きく改善した。

17年に発足したトランプ政権は、オバマ氏のレガシー（政治的遺産）を否定する狙いで、強硬路線にかじを切った。米国人の渡航を制限したり、米国からの送金を規制したりするなど、経済制裁を強化してきた。

次期大統領となるバイデン氏は、キューバとの関係改善をめざす考えを示している。だが、米国・キューバ貿易経済評議会議長のジョン・カブリック氏によると、テロ支援国家を解除するには、テロ活動に関わっていないことを証明する手続きなどが必要で、数カ月以上かかるという。

カブリック氏は11日、朝日新聞の取材に「トランプ政権は過去4年、米国企業のキューバへの関心を失わせようとしてきた。再指定で第三国の企業もキューバやベネズエラとの取引に慎重になるとみられる。中国やロシア、イランが両国への支援を強め、バイデン政権の外交を難しくする可能性もある」と述べた。

一方、キューバ外務省は11日、再指定について「最大限に非難する」とする声明を発表。声明では「信用を失った不誠実で、モラルのない政府の尊大な行いだ」と米国を批判した。（ワシントン＝渡辺丘、サンパウロ＝岡田玄）

Radio Taiwan International

Taipei, Taiwan

12 January 2021

下台前又出手 川普政府再列古巴為恐怖主義資助國

時間

新聞引據：採訪、法新社

撰稿編輯：鄭景懋



古巴領導人勞爾·卡斯楚(Raul Castro)。(AFP)

即將卸任的川普政府11日宣布，將古巴重新列入美國的恐怖主義資助國黑名單，也在最後一刻，對總統當選人拜登(Joe Biden)預期要減緩外交緊張的努力設下障礙。被列入恐怖主義資助國名單將嚴重阻礙外國投資，而且唯有經拜登政府的正式審查後才能夠除名，代表這項措施可能將實施數個月，並放慢降低雙方的緊張關係。

在剩下9天任期之下，國務卿蓬佩奧(Mike Pompeo)以與哥倫比亞叛軍有連結、與委內瑞拉左翼結盟，以及為多名美國逃犯提供庇護等理由，將古巴再次列入黑名單。

蓬佩奧在一項聲明中表示：「有了這項行動，我們將再次追究古巴政府的責任，並傳遞一項清楚的訊息：卡斯楚政權必須終止對國際恐怖主義，以及對顛覆美國司法的支持。」蓬佩奧所指的是前古巴領導人斐代爾·卡斯楚(Fidel Castro)及現任領導人勞爾·卡斯楚(Raul Castro)。

他說：「美國將持續支持古巴人民對一個民主政府的渴望，以及對人權的尊重，包含宗教、言論及結社的自由。」

這是蓬佩奧在任期最後幾天所做的多項閃電決定中的最新一項，就在華盛頓大多數的焦點都正放在彈劾川普之際。川普因為煽動支持者阻止國會認證拜登勝選，引發造成5人死亡的國會山莊暴動，而面臨被二次彈劾。

自9日以來，蓬佩奧已將葉門的青年運動(Huthi)叛軍列為恐怖組織，不理會援助組織提出的警告，同時也鬆綁了美台官員往來的限制。

前總統歐巴馬(Barack Obama)曾在2015年將古巴從恐怖主義資助國名單中移除，並推動兩國關係正常化，同時表示，美國對這個共產主義島國長達半世紀的孤立政策，是失敗的。

川普先前已經推翻了多項歐巴馬對古巴的翻轉政策，並對委內瑞拉實施制裁，也為他在美國總統大選時贏得關鍵州佛羅里達州移民社群的支持。

拜登已經表態，可能重新恢復至少部分在歐巴馬時代開啟、但遭川普阻擋的往來作法，包含允許古巴裔美國人回古巴探親，以及匯款回古巴。

民主黨的警告

民主黨籍眾議院外交事務委員會(House Foreign Affairs Committee)新任主席米克斯(Gregory Meeks)說：「總統川普及國務卿蓬佩奧的虛偽，令人震驚但並不意外。」

米克斯說：「川普，在2008年還是一名商人時，在古巴註冊了川普集團的商標，他一直將古巴當成政治足球，完全不顧長期受苦的古巴人民。」

要將古巴從黑名單中移除，拜登提名的國務卿布林肯(Antony Blinken)需要啟動一次審查，證明哈瓦那(Havana)在過去6個月內沒有與恐怖主義有任何關聯。

古巴外交部長羅德里格斯(Bruno Rodriguez)批評這次重新列名「偏激又虛偽」。他在推特上表示：「所有真正憂心恐怖主義災難和受害者的人，都能看出這個行動中的政治機會主義。」

商業往來冷卻

關注兩國商業關係的美國-古巴經貿委員會(U.S.-Cuba Trade and Economic Council)主席柯維洛(John Kavulich)表示，蓬佩奧這項行動的立即影響，將包括阻礙金融機構與古巴做生意。他也說，保險公司對於往來古巴的飛機和船隻，也可能暫停承保或提高費率。

柯維洛認為：「與古巴共和國的交易可能會面臨更多的審查，將導致更少政府與企業願意與古巴交往。」

但他也懷疑，這項行動能徹底改變古巴的政策，包括古巴對於委內瑞拉總統馬杜洛(Nicolas Maduro)的堅定支持。川普政府一直尋求要推翻馬杜洛。

蓬佩奧為此決定提出的一項合法理由是，古巴拒絕引渡哥倫比亞民族解放軍(National Liberation Army, ELN)的指揮官們。他們被控參與在2019年1月於哥倫比亞首都波哥大(Bogota)發生的一起汽車炸彈攻擊事件，造成22人死亡。

古巴先前表示，基於古巴在民族解放軍與哥倫比亞政府之間的調解立場，古巴不會交出這些指揮官。

蓬佩奧也指出，古巴為黑人權力(Black Power)激進分子沙庫(Assata Shakur)等美國人提供庇護。沙庫因殺害一名紐澤西州州警而被定罪，他在逃獄後潛逃至古巴。

在這份恐怖主義資助國黑名單上還有其他3個國家，伊朗、北韓及敘利亞。在蘇丹經過民主轉型、補償過去的攻擊，以及達成了承認以色列的協議之後，川普在去年將蘇丹從黑名單中移除。

EFE

Madrid, Spain

11 January 2021

Exilio y organizaciones cubanas aplauden vuelta de Cuba a lista negra de EEUU

Miami (EEUU), 11 ene (EFE).- Líderes del exilio y dirigentes de organizaciones cubanas en Estados Unidos acogieron este lunes con satisfacción el regreso de Cuba a la lista de países a los que el Gobierno estadounidense considera patrocinadores del terrorismo y algunos se preguntaron por qué no se incluyó también a Venezuela.

"El Departamento de Estado ha designado a Cuba como Estado patrocinador del terrorismo por brindar apoyo repetidamente a actos de terrorismo internacional al otorgar refugio seguro a terroristas", anunció el secretario de Estado, Mike Pompeo, en un comunicado publicado hoy.

La Administración Trump, iniciada en 2017, toma la medida cuando faltan menos de dos semanas para que asuma la Presidencia el demócrata Joe Biden y seis años después de que en 2015 el entonces presidente Barack Obama sacara de la lista a Cuba como parte de su política de normalización de relaciones con la isla.

Juan Antonio Blanco, director ejecutivo de la Fundación para los Derechos Humanos en Cuba, dijo que es "una ingenuidad" creer que la Administración Trump metió a la isla "de un plumazo en esta lista" y "simplista" pensar que con esto quiere dejarle "el campo minado" a la nueva administración en asuntos cubanos.

Este proceso llevó "años de investigaciones", consideró.

"Fui uno de los que hizo investigaciones en ese terreno y llegamos a la conclusión de que Cuba había aplicado una metodología de subcontratación mediante la cual todas las actividades criminales e ilegales con estos grupos las había exportado a Venezuela", agregó en declaraciones a Efe.

Orlando Gutiérrez, líder del Directorio Democrático Cubano, subrayó que es un "paso correcto".

"El régimen (cubano) sigue ligado a prácticas, personalidades y organizaciones terroristas. Debe ser tratado como tal", dijo a Efe.

Preguntado acerca de lo que puede pasar con esta decisión cuando Biden sea presidente, Gutiérrez opinó que para cambiarla se necesita "un proceso extenso", y agregó que se le debería exigir a "este régimen dictatorial en Cuba" que cumpla "con requisitos estrictos y reales para salir de esa clasificación".

"Creo que a este régimen se le ha dado tiempo y espacio para que modifique su comportamiento y no lo hace", agregó.

Antonio Díaz Sánchez, del Movimiento Cristiano Liberación (MCL), afirmó a Efe que Cuba "nunca debió salir" de la lista.

El cubano es un "Estado terrorista por naturaleza con sus propios ciudadanos" y lo sigue siendo apoyando el terror en otras naciones, agregó Díaz Sánchez.

Ramón Saúl Sánchez, del Movimiento Democracia, también se mostró de acuerdo y opinó que la única forma de que Cuba salga de la lista de Estados patrocinadores del terrorismo es "dejando de aterrorizar a su pueblo y de auspiciar a regímenes terroristas como los de Venezuela e Irán, y de dar refugio a terroristas". John S. Kavulich, titular del Consejo Económico y Comercial Estados Unidos-Cuba, se preguntó por qué la Administración Trump cree que Cuba merece volver a la lista, mientras que no ve en Venezuela una conducta similar para incluirla.

"La Administración Trump ha ligado con éxito a Cuba con Venezuela y a Venezuela con actividades malignas", destaca este especialista en las relaciones estadounidense-cubanas.

Cuba y Venezuela están ligados con China, Irán, Rusia, Siria y Corea del Norte y con las guerrillas colombianas, agrega.

Kavulich cree que la decisión anunciada este lunes por Pompeo puede tener impacto en las limitadas relaciones políticas, económicas y comerciales entre ambos países y también puede afectar a las relaciones de EE.UU. con terceros países.

En cuanto a las consecuencias concretas de esta decisión para Cuba, opinó que "las instituciones financieras pueden tener otra razón para evitar las transacciones" con la isla y además puede disuadir a gobiernos y empresas de vincularse con ese país.

También puede ocasionar que las compañías de seguros suspendan la cobertura de transacciones (barcos, aviones etc..) o aumenten el costo de las pólizas.

"Con esta acción, una vez más haremos responsable al Gobierno de Cuba y enviaremos un mensaje claro: el régimen de los Castro debe poner fin a su apoyo al terrorismo internacional y a la subversión de la justicia estadounidense", indicó Pompeo en un comunicado.

El jefe de la diplomacia estadounidense justificó el retorno de la isla a la lista "por brindar apoyo repetidamente a actos de terrorismo internacional al otorgar refugio seguro a terroristas". EFE

BBC Mundo

London, United Kingdom

11 January 2021

Qué impacto tiene para Cuba volver a la lista de países patrocinadores del terrorismo del gobierno de EE.UU.

Cuba vuelve a estar en la lista de países patrocinadores del terrorismo de Estados Unidos.

La decisión, hecha pública por el secretario de Estado, Mike Pompeo, llega a pocos días del cambio de gobierno en Estados Unidos y supondrá un nuevo reto para la administración de Joe Biden.

"Con esta medida de nuevo hacemos responsable al gobierno de Cuba y mandamos un claro mensaje: el régimen castrista debe acabar con su apoyo al terrorismo internacional y con la subversión de la justicia estadounidense", dijo Pompeo en un comunicado.

En 2015, el expresidente Barack Obama había sacado a Cuba de la lista en la que llevaba desde 1982 en lo que supuso un paso importante en el "deshielo" que un año después resultaría en que ambos países reanudaron sus relaciones diplomáticas.

Pero ese acercamiento, como muchas otras políticas del presidente Obama, fue revertido por el gobierno de Donald Trump, quien dio paso a una política de mano dura tanto con Cuba como con Venezuela, que le ha dado mucha popularidad en el sur de Florida.

Pero la decisión de meter a Cuba en la lista en que solo están Corea del Norte, Irán y Siria (después de que saliera Sudán tras reconocer el estado de Israel) es algo que podría ser revertido por Joe Biden cuando asuma la presidencia el 20 enero.

¿Cómo lo justifica Estados Unidos?

Para dar una justificación legal, Pompeo señaló la negativa de Cuba a extraditar a miembros del Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) de Colombia tras un atentado con bomba en enero de 2019 en un academia policial de Bogotá en el que murieron 22 personas.

Cuba ya ha dicho que no lo hará debido a su papel como mediador en los diálogos de paz entre el ELN y el gobierno de Colombia.

Los líderes del ELN, la mayor guerrilla activa de Colombia, viajaron a La Habana como parte de las negociaciones de paz con el gobierno que se rompieron tras el atentado.

Pompeo señaló también que Cuba es el santuario de fugitivos de Estados Unidos como Joanne Chesimard, también conocida como Assata Shakur, una militante de Black Power que huyó a la isla tras escapar de la prisión en que cumplía condena por la muerte de un policía en Nueva Jersey en 1973.

El secretario de Estado habló también de la alianza de Cuba con Venezuela, donde Estados Unidos promueve un cambio de gobierno.

Según Pompeo, el apoyo de la isla permite al presidente Nicolás Maduro mantenerse en el poder y crear "un entorno permisivo para que terroristas internacionales vivan en Venezuela". Y sin embargo, el país sudamericano no está incluido en la lista.

"Si el objetivo del gobierno Trump es presionar al de Miguel Díaz-Canel (presidente de Cuba) para que deje de apoyar a Maduro, va a fracasar", previó en diálogo con BBC Mundo John Kavulich, presidente del Consejo Económico y Comercial Estados Unidos-Cuba, con sede en Nueva York.

¿Qué implica estar en la lista?

A los países que considera patrocinadores del terrorismo, Washington les prohíbe exportar o vender armas, ciertas exportaciones que también mejorarían sus capacidades militares son controladas y les restringe la asistencia económica.

Los países en la lista no pueden acceder a préstamos del Fondo Monetario Internacional y otras instituciones globales.

El canciller Bruno Rodríguez ya condenó hace días lo que se confirmó este lunes: el reingreso de Cuba en la lista de países patrocinadores del terrorismo.

En el caso particular de la isla, estas sanciones ahondaban las que ya habían sido impuestas de manera más extensa por el embargo económico vigente desde la década de 1960.

Cuba ya estuvo en la lista de 1982 hasta 2015, en medio de un proceso de normalización de relaciones entre Washington y La Habana impulsado por el presidente Obama.

"El gobierno de Cuba quería extinguir la llama que mantenían viva algunas compañías de Estados Unidos de reconectar con Cuba. Este lunes, el Departamento de Estado lanzó un balde de agua", afirmó a BBC Mundo Kavulich.

¿Qué impacto tendrá para Cuba?

Impactará en lo que queda de las relaciones comerciales y políticas entre Estados Unidos y Cuba.

"Las instituciones financieras tendrán otro motivo para evitar operaciones con Cuba", dijo Kavulich.

Con la unificación monetaria, el peso cubano pasa a ser la única moneda corriente de la isla. Veinticuatro pesos cubanos equivalen a un dólar estadounidense.

Las aseguradoras podrán suspender la cobertura de transacciones y operaciones.

"Y habrá más escrutinio en las operaciones con Cuba, lo que resultará en que menos gobiernos y empresas querrán tener una relación con la isla", afirmó Kavulich.

"Para las empresas estadounidenses será otro desincentivo, entre muchos otros, para buscar oportunidades para exportar, importar o suministrar servicios a Cuba", agregó.

Esto llega en un momento especialmente delicado para Cuba.

El 1 de enero entraron en vigor reformas económicas de gran impacto como la implantación de la moneda única, el peso cubano, a una tasa de cambio de US\$1=24 pesos.

Hasta ahora, además del peso cubano, también circulaba el peso cubano convertible, cuyo valor era equivalente a un dólar estadounidense.

La medida está acompañada por la subida de precios de alimentos, bienes básicos y servicios, y también un incremento de salarios y pensiones.

Analistas dentro y fuera de Cuba describen estas reformas como las más significativas desde las introducidas en los 90 para paliar la profunda recesión tras el colapso de la Unión Soviética, principal benefactor de la isla durante años.

Cuba atraviesa una crisis económica agravada por la pandemia de coronavirus y el endurecimiento de sanciones del gobierno de Trump.

Este contexto agudizó la escasez de divisas, alimentos, medicinas y otros bienes esenciales. El gobierno de Cuba dijo que su economía se había contraído un 11% en 2020.

¿Cuál es la respuesta en Cuba?

El canciller, Bruno Rodríguez, condenó la decisión de Estados Unidos.

"El oportunismo político de esta acción es reconocido por todo el que tenga una preocupación honesta ante el flagelo del terrorismo y sus víctimas", expresó Rodríguez en Twitter.

Condenamos la hipócrita y cínica calificación de #Cuba como Estado patrocinador del terrorismo, anunciada por EEUU.

El oportunismo político de esta acción es reconocido por todo el que tenga una preocupación honesta ante el flagelo del terrorismo y sus víctimas.

— Bruno Rodríguez P (@BrunoRguezP) January 11, 2021

AFP

Paris, France

11 January 2021

A días de la partida de Trump, EEUU vuelve a declarar a Cuba "patrocinador del terrorismo"



El presidente de Estados Unidos, Donald Trump, el secretario de Estado, Mike Pompeo, y el secretario del Tesoro Steven Mnuchin, el 29 de mayo de 2020 en la Casa Blanca, en Washington [afp_tickers](#)

Estados Unidos anunció el lunes, a nueve días de la salida del poder del presidente Donald Trump, que declaró nuevamente a Cuba "Estado patrocinador del terrorismo", una medida que La Habana denunció como "oportunismo político".

Cuba había sido retirada en 2015 de esa lista negra estadounidense, que conlleva sanciones económicas, por el antecesor de Trump, Barack Obama, quien consideró que los esfuerzos de medio siglo de Estados Unidos para aislar a la isla comunista fueron un fracaso.

Pero la administración Trump, que desde que asumió en 2017 revirtió esa política de acercamiento a Cuba, decidió reingresarla cuando se prepara para entregar el poder el 20 de enero a Joe Biden, exvicepresidente de Obama.

"Con esta medida, volveremos a responsabilizar al gobierno de Cuba y enviaremos un mensaje claro: el régimen de Castro debe poner fin a su apoyo al terrorismo internacional y la subversión de la justicia estadounidense", dijo el jefe de la diplomacia estadounidense, Mike Pompeo, en alusión al fallecido Fidel Castro y a su hermano Raúl, líderes de la revolución de 1959.

"Durante décadas, el gobierno cubano ha alimentado, alojado y brindado atención médica a asesinos, fabricantes de bombas y secuestradores, mientras que muchos cubanos pasan hambre, se quedan sin hogar y no tienen medicamentos básicos", añadió en un comunicado.

Pompeo destacó la "maligna interferencia" de Cuba en Venezuela y en otros países latinoamericanos.

También señaló el "apoyo" de La Habana a la guerrilla colombiana del Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN), que Estados Unidos considera una organización terrorista extranjera, así como a disidentes de las extintas Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC).

Apuntó en particular a la negativa de La Habana a extraditar a líderes del ELN por un atentado con coche bomba en enero de 2019 en una academia de policía de Bogotá que dejó 22 muertos. Cuba rechazó la entrega por su papel de mediador en las negociaciones de paz entre el ELN y el gobierno colombiano.

Pompeo acusó además a Cuba de acoger a varios fugitivos estadounidenses de la justicia desde los años 1970, como Joanne Chesimard, Ishmael LaBeet y Charles Lee Hill, entre otros.

- "Oportunismo político" -

Esta designación tiene un fuerte impacto económico para la isla comunista, dado que restringe el comercio y la ayuda exterior y expone a los inversionistas extranjeros a ser procesados por Estados Unidos.

"Regresar a Cuba a la lista también puede afectar lo que queda de la relación comercial, económica y política entre Estados Unidos y Cuba y probablemente afectar las relaciones comerciales de Estados Unidos con terceros países", dijo John Kavulich, presidente del Consejo Económico y Comercial Estados Unidos-Cuba, que asesora a empresas sobre negocios en la isla.

Solo tres naciones permanecen en este listado estadounidense: Irán, Corea del Norte y Siria, después de que Trump retirara a Sudán el mes pasado.

Cuba, que bajo el gobierno de Trump ha visto un recrudecimiento del embargo estadounidense vigente desde 1962, condenó lo que calificó de "hipócrita y cínica calificación".

"El oportunismo político de esta acción es reconocido por todo el que tenga una preocupación honesta ante el flagelo del terrorismo y sus víctimas", dijo el canciller Bruno Rodríguez en Twitter.

El presidente venezolano, Nicolás Maduro, un fuerte aliado de La Habana, rechazó "categóricamente" la medida y acusó al gobierno de Trump de pretender "minar el camino de la política internacional antes de salir por la puerta trasera de la historia mundial".

El futuro gobierno de Biden podría eliminar a Cuba de este listado, pero primero el Departamento de Estado tendría que realizar una revisión formal, lo que significa que la medida puede estar en vigor durante meses.

La redesignación de Cuba es vista por muchos como un intento de último minuto del gobierno de Trump para complicar cualquier intención de Biden de reconectar con La Habana.

Durante la campaña electoral, el demócrata dijo que buscaría "eliminar las restricciones de Trump a las transferencias de dinero y viajes" que perjudican a los cubanos y separan a las familias.

Gregory Meeks, el congresista demócrata que encabeza el Comité de Asuntos Exteriores de la Cámara de Representantes, se dijo "indignado" por la decisión de Trump "menos de una semana después de que incitó a un ataque terrorista interno en el Capitolio de Estados Unidos".

"Durante cuatro años, la política de la administración Trump hacia Cuba se ha centrado en dañar al pueblo cubano", dijo Meeks, señalando la "hipocresía" de Trump y Pompeo.

En diciembre, Meeks había dicho que el acercamiento de Obama a Cuba logró cambiar "décadas de política exterior fallida" que ni promovió los objetivos de Estados Unidos ni ayudó al pueblo cubano.

The New York Times
New York, New York
11 January 2021

Pompeo Returns Cuba to Terrorism Sponsor List, Constraining Biden's Plans

In announcing the move, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo cited Cuba's hosting of American fugitives and Colombian rebels and its support for Venezuela's authoritarian leader.



The statement by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo cited Cuba's refusal to extradite 10 leaders of Colombia's National Liberation Army, who have been living Havana since 2017. Credit...Jessica Megowan/Getty Images

By Michael Crowley, Ed Augustin and Kirk Semple

WASHINGTON — The State Department designated Cuba a state sponsor of terrorism on Monday in a last-minute foreign policy stroke that will complicate the incoming Biden administration's plans to restore friendlier relations with Havana.

In a statement, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo cited Cuba's hosting of 10 Colombian rebel leaders, along with a handful of American fugitives wanted for crimes committed in the 1970s, and Cuba's support for the authoritarian leader of Venezuela, Nicolás Maduro.

Mr. Pompeo said the action sent the message that “the Castro regime must end its support for international terrorism and subversion of U.S. justice.”

The New York Times reported last month Mr. Pompeo was weighing the move and had a plan to do so on his desk.

The action, announced with just days remaining in the Trump administration, reverses a step taken in 2015 after President Barack Obama restored diplomatic relations with Cuba, calling its decades of political and economic isolation a relic of the Cold War.

Once in office, President Trump acted swiftly to undermine Mr. Obama's policy of openness, to the delight of Cuban-American and other Latino voters in Florida who welcomed his aggressive stance toward both Havana and its socialist, anti-American ally, Mr. Maduro.

Other Republicans cheered on Mr. Trump, saying that Havana had failed to enforce political overhauls and had continued to crack down on dissent, breaking promises it had made to the Obama administration.

United States officials said the plan to restore Cuba to the terrorism sponsor list was developed, in a break from standard process, by the State Department's Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs and not its Counterterrorism Bureau, which would typically play a central role in such a decision.

Monday's designation said that Cuba has “repeatedly provided support for acts of international terrorism,” according to the State Department's criteria for adding countries to the list, which includes only three other nations: Iran, North Korea and Syria.

The move automatically triggers United States sanctions against Cuba — likely to have negligible effect, experts said, given the scale of existing American penalties against Havana.

At Home: Our best suggestions for how to live a full and cultured life during the pandemic, at home. But the action could be a symbolic deterrent for businesses, adding “another among many disincentives to seek opportunities to export to, import from or provide services for Cuba,” said John Kavulich, the president of the U.S.-Cuba Trade and Economic Council.

Mr. Pompeo's statement cited Cuba's refusal to extradite 10 leaders of Colombia's National Liberation Army, also designated a foreign terrorist organization, who have been living in Havana since 2017. The

leaders traveled to Havana in 2017 for peace talks hosted by Cuba to end a long-running insurgency in Colombia, and have not returned home.

The National Liberation Army has claimed responsibility for a bombing of a Bogotá police academy in January 2019 that killed 22 people and injured more than 87 others.

Mr. Pompeo also cited the presence in Cuba of three fugitives charged with or convicted of murder in the early 1970s, including Joanne D. Chesimard, 73, a former member of the Black Liberation Army who now goes by the name Assata Shakur, and who remains on the F.B.I.'s list of most wanted terrorists for killing a New Jersey state trooper in 1973.

His statement also said that Cuba's government "engages in a range of malign behavior across the region," and that its intelligence and security services were "assisting Nicolás Maduro to maintain his stranglehold over his people while allowing terrorist organizations to operate." He said that the Cuban government supported Colombian rebels beyond its borders and that its assistance for Mr. Maduro had helped create "a permissive environment for international terrorists to live and thrive within Venezuela."

On the campaign trail, President-elect Joseph R. Biden Jr. spoke of a return to Mr. Obama's more open approach to Havana, pledging to "promptly reverse the failed Trump policies that have inflicted harm on the Cuban people and done nothing to advance democracy and human rights."

While the Biden administration can remove Cuba from the terrorism list, doing so will require a review process that could take months.

Ted A. Henken, an associate professor of sociology at Baruch College in New York, called the designation "a symbolic final gesture" by the Trump administration toward Cuba, as well as a reward for the Cuban exile community and like-minded Latino voters who turned out in surprisingly strong numbers for the president in November.

"It is unjustified based on the merits or evidence," he said. "Cuba is a dictatorship that systematically denies fundamental rights to its citizens, but it has not been shown to engage in terrorist activities."

"The designation is politically motivated for a domestic audience in the U.S.," he added.

William LeoGrande, a professor of government at American University in Washington, noted that Mr. Trump's numerous sanctions against Cuba meant that the new designation would have little additional effect. Over the past two years, Cuba has been subjected to the most intense United States sanctions of the last 50 years, which have contributed to rationing and profound shortages of basic necessities like medicine and food. Its economy shrank 11 percent last year, according to Alejandro Gil, Cuba's economy minister.

Mr. LeoGrande said the designation may impede legal financial transactions involving American financial institutions, like a United States airlines paying the Cuban government for landing fees, as banks grow more leery of additional supervision of such exchanges from Washington.

Banking transactions through third countries could also be affected. During Mr. Trump's term, European banks have become increasingly reluctant to issue payments to Cuban state enterprises. The island's terrorism designation could further reduce risk appetite.

Mr. LeoGrande said the Cuban government would seek to avoid escalating the conflict, anticipating that Mr. Biden would try to improve relations. On the streets of Havana, the news was met with anger. "This is a lie," said Sergio Herrera, 45, a bicycle-taxi driver. "Trump has his neck in a noose" politically, and "is looking for excuses," he said.

NBC News
New York, New York
11 January 2021

U.S. declares Cuba a state sponsor of terrorism

Cuba was first placed on the list in 1982 under Reagan but was removed in 2015 by Obama as part of a normalization of relations.

The Trump administration declared Cuba a state sponsor of terrorism on Monday, the latest in a series of actions aimed at undoing the Obama-era legacy of opening U.S. relations with the island nation just weeks before President-elect Joe Biden takes office.

"The Trump Administration has been focused from the start on denying the Castro regime the resources it uses to oppress its people at home, and countering its malign interference in Venezuela and the rest of the Western Hemisphere," said Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in a statement. "With this action, we will once again hold Cuba's government accountable and send a clear message: the Castro regime must end its support for international terrorism and subversion of U.S. justice."

The State Department had briefed Congress on the impending move Monday morning, according to two congressional aides who spoke to NBC News on the condition of anonymity, as they were not authorized to speak publicly. Bloomberg had first reported on the impending action.

Cuba was placed on the list in 1982 under President Ronald Reagan but was removed in 2015 by President Barack Obama as part of a normalization of relations between the U.S. and Cuba. Placing Cuba back on the list before the Trump administration leaves office will place a major roadblock for efforts by incoming Biden officials to return to the Obama-era policy.

Reversing Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's action would require the Biden administration to certify to Congress that there has been a fundamental change in leadership in Cuba and that the government is not supporting acts of international terrorism, has not for the previous six months and will not do so in the future.

The designation results in restrictions on U.S. foreign assistance, a ban on U.S. arms exports and sales, controls on dual-use items that could be used for both military and civilian purposes and the withdrawal of U.S. support for loans from global financial institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank.

Still, the move may be largely symbolic. Given the series of sanctions and restrictions already put in place under the Trump administration, it's unclear what further financial hardship the designation would present the Cuban government.

Pompeo has been weighing the decision to place Cuba back on the terrorism list for months, sources said. The State Department tipped their hand to Monday's decision as early as last May, notifying Congress that in addition to the three countries already on the list, Venezuela and Cuba were now certified under the Arms Export Control Act as "not cooperating fully" with U.S. counterterrorism efforts in 2019.

Among the reasons for the designation was Cuba's refusal to extradite Joanne Chesimard, also known as Assata Shakur, an American who fled to Cuba after being convicted of killing a New Jersey state trooper in 1973. The State Department also cited Cuba's denial of a Colombian request to extradite members of a guerilla group that claimed responsibility for a bombing in a police academy; the Cuban government has cited the ongoing peace negotiation protocols.

The Trump administration has systematically called out the Cuban government for backing socialist Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro.

"The argument to put Cuba back on the list is for the administration a simple straight line to Venezuela," John Kavulich, president of the U.S.-Cuba Trade and Economic Council, said about the expected announcement. "They've made the case, constantly, that Maduro is only there because of Cuba."

"The Cuban intelligence and security apparatus has infiltrated Venezuela's security and military forces," said Pompeo's statement, adding Cuba assisted Maduro in maintaining "his stranglehold over his people while allowing terrorist organizations to operate."

In December, Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez denounced Pompeo's potential "maneuvers" as an attempt to "please the anti-Cuban minority in Florida."

Iran, North Korea and Syria are the only nations currently designated as state sponsors of terrorism, which requires the State Department to certify a country "repeatedly provided support for acts of international terrorism." The Trump administration removed Sudan from the list last month shortly after they agreed to formally recognize Israel.

The Miami Herald

Miami, Florida

11 January 2021

Trump adds Cuba back to list of states sponsoring terrorism in final move against island

By Nora Gámez Torres and Michael Wilner

Pompeo blames Cuba for the situation in Venezuela

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo lashed out at Cuba and Russia for backing Nicolás Maduro's regime in Venezuela. During a March 11, 2019, press conference, he said those two countries are responsible for the suffering of the Venezuelan people. By Department of State via Twitter

The United States added Cuba back to its list of states accused of sponsoring terrorism Monday in one of the Trump administration's last foreign policy decisions, a move that caps four years of escalating economic and diplomatic pressure against the island.

In a statement, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo accused Cuba's government of having "fed, housed, and provided medical care for murderers, bombmakers, and hijackers." In particular, he mentioned Cuba's refusal to extradite to Colombia members of the National Liberation Army guerrilla following a terrorist attack in Bogotá and a breakdown in peace talks.

He also cited the presence on the island of fugitives from U.S. justice like Joan Chesimard, who lives in Cuba with the name Assata Shakur, and is on the FBI's list of most-wanted terrorists. She was convicted for the killing of New Jersey State Trooper Werner Foerster in 1973.

"With this action, we will once again hold Cuba's government accountable and send a clear message: the Castro regime must end its support for international terrorism and subversion of U.S. justice," he said.

The inclusion of Cuba on the blacklist alongside North Korea, Syria and Iran is the culmination of the "maximum pressure" campaign launched by the Trump administration to punish the Cuban government for its support of Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro and to dismantle the engagement policies of ex-President Barack Obama.

The decision comes just a week before President-elect Joe Biden is sworn into office. The incoming leader is widely expected to restore at least some of Obama's opening with Cuba. While it can be reversed, it could nonetheless spell further economic trouble for the island, which is already suffering its worst economic contraction since the fall of the Soviet Union.

"Transactions with the Republic of Cuba would have an increase in scrutiny, resulting in fewer governments and companies wanting to engage with it," said John Kavulich, president of the U.S.-Cuba Trade and Economic Council, a New York-based nonpartisan organization.

Earlier today, a senior administration official told McClatchy the decision was going to be announced this Monday.

President Donald Trump's advisers have been weighing whether to return Cuba to the list for some time. In January 2019, a senior administration official told the Miami Herald that the issue was being considered due to Cuban security and intelligence support for Maduro. A year later, the State Department included Cuba in its list of countries that do not cooperate with the United States in the fight against terrorism, also citing the harboring of Colombian rebels and fugitives of U.S. justice.

The Obama administration eliminated Cuba from the list of countries sponsoring terrorism in 2015. That was one of the Cuban government's main demands in order to agree to restore relations. Cuba had been on that list since 1982, when it was included because of Fidel Castro's support of guerrillas in Central America. Trump vowed since early in his presidency to reverse "the terrible and misguided deal with the Castro regime."

His government eliminated so-called "people-to-people" trips, limited flights and remittances to Cuba, prohibited Americans from staying in government hotels, and allowed lawsuits against companies suspected of "trafficking" with properties confiscated by Castro's government.

The administration has also sanctioned Cuban military companies, government officials—including Raúl Castro—and punished companies that facilitate the shipment of Venezuelan oil to the island.

Cuba's designation comes at a difficult time for the island, whose economy contracted 11 percent in 2020. The Cuban government has been unable to pay many international creditors due to a lack of liquidity.

Although the measure does not entail more economic sanctions, the announcement may further reduce foreign investment on the island, as most companies prefer to avoid possible fines or the legal costs of doing business in blacklisted countries.

Kavulich said insurance companies could either suspend coverage of transactions and operations of ships and aircraft going to Cuba, or increase prices.

The designation could also limit the range of exports from the U.S. to Cuba, including software and technology and other items for the support of the Cuban people, said Ric Herrero, executive director of the Cuba Study Group. In addition, it triggers a Florida state law prohibiting state universities from using state funds for travel or research activities in blacklisted countries.

"It may also impact commercial travel, as banks that process transactions on behalf of airlines around the world have internal policies that prohibit business with SSOT-listed countries, and could pull out of licensed activities," he said.

Herrero, a frequent critic of the Trump administration's Cuba policies, said the designation seemed to be guided more by politics than "factual basis."

"It appears to be another cynical play to hamstring the foreign policy of the incoming Biden administration and set the stage for the next election in Florida, all at the expense of Cuba and the Cuban people," he said. In the announcement, Pompeo mentioned Cuba's engagement "in a range of malign behavior across the region," including "assisting Nicholas Maduro to maintain his stranglehold over his people while allowing terrorist organizations to operate," in Venezuela as among the reasons for the listing.

The public designation could further "poison" the atmosphere of bilateral relations, "but it would not significantly delay President Biden from re-engaging with Cuba," said William LeoGrande, a professor of government at American University. He estimates the incoming administration could again remove Cuba from the list "in two or three months," following the required bureaucratic process.

LeoGrande is one of the authors of a policy memo that asked the Biden administration to pursue normalization policies with Cuba.

WPLG

Miami, Florida

11 January 2021

Pompeo re-designates Cuba as state sponsor of terrorism

MIAMI – Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced on Monday that the U.S. is re-designating Cuba as a state sponsor of terrorism.

Former President Barack Obama’s administration had removed Cuba from the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism. Its reinstatement had been a longtime goal of President Donald Trump.

“The Cuban government has fed, housed, and provided medical care for murderers, bombmakers, and hijackers, while many Cubans go hungry, homeless, and without basic medicine,” Pompeo said in a statement referring to Colombia’s Marxist guerrillas and U.S. fugitives.

Pompeo also criticized Cuba’s relations with Venezuela, also an ally of Iran, China, and Russia. Trump re-imposed sanctions on Iran after withdrawing from the 2015 nuclear deal in 2018.

“The Cuban intelligence and security apparatus has infiltrated Venezuela’s security and military forces,” Pompeo said, adding Cuba helps Maduro to allow “terrorist organizations to operate.”

John Kavulich, the president of the U.S.-Cuba Trade and Economic Council, said the designation could prompt banks to decide that they want nothing to do with Cuba. Whether companies believe it is political or not, legal teams will likely advise them to tread softly with Cuba. That’s the goal of the Trump administration, to make individuals and companies say Cuba is just not worth the effort, Kavulich said.

“You’re going to have issues relating to finance,” Kavulich said, adding that “if the insurance companies increase their rate, the airlines may pass that along.”

The U.S. State Department released the announcement just after Pompeo spoke about the threat of the Chinese Communist Party’s aim at “hegemonic dominance” during an event by Voice of America, a broadcaster funded by the U.S. Congress. Pompeo leaves office on Jan. 20, the day of President-elect Joe Biden’s inauguration.

Kavulich believes adding Cuba to the list will hamstring the incoming Biden administration as they will be forced to go through a checklist to justify removing Cuba from the list and that could take months.

Also, there are ten members of Congress who are of Cuban descent and they will likely make it harder for Biden to change the designation. As Democrats take over the Senate, Sen. Bob Menendez, of New Jersey, will chair the powerful Senate Foreign Relations Committee. A week ago, on CNN, Menendez pointed to his long career fighting the Castro regime and their human rights abuses.

“The state’s sponsor of terrorism designation has to be done on facts. If the facts substantiate that Cuba should be returned, then certainly I would support that,” Menendez told CNN’s Jim Acosta.

The Hill

Washington DC

10 January 2021

Trump, Florida complicate Biden approach to Cuba



By Celine Castronuovo

The Trump administration's hard-line approach to Cuba may complicate efforts by President-elect Joe Biden to return to Obama-era policies.

The State Department is reportedly weighing a proposal to put Cuba back on its list of state sponsors of terrorism, a step intended to make it more difficult for Biden to open relations.

In addition, while former President Obama won the state of Florida twice, Biden was defeated by Trump in Florida in 2020 — at least partly because of disappointingly low support from Latin American voters in the state. Much of this has been attributed to GOP efforts to paint Biden as a president who would bring socialism to the United States. Biden won just a narrow victory in Florida's Miami-Dade County, while Florida Reps. Debbie Mucarsel-Powell (D) and Donna Shalala (D) both lost their seats to Trump-aligned GOP challengers.

In 2014, Obama and Cuban leader Raúl Castro announced that their governments would restore full diplomatic ties, signaling the start of a new era following more than 50 years of bilateral tensions. The following year, Obama removed Cuba from the state sponsors of terrorism list. The Caribbean country had first been placed on the list by President Reagan in 1982 for its support of leftist militant groups in Central America and Africa, leading to decades of sanctions and trade embargoes. In 2016, Obama became the first U.S. president to visit Cuba since Calvin Coolidge.

Upon taking office, Trump signaled a change, imposing restrictions on commerce with certain Cuban businesses, as well as a ban on individual educational and cultural exchanges. The administration has also put restrictions on remittances, or money transfers, from Cuban Americans to family members back home in Cuba, with October Treasury Department rules prohibiting remittances to Cuba through companies controlled by the Cuban military.

John Kavulich, president of the U.S.-Cuba Trade and Economic Council, says that these actions, as well as deliberations among the State Department to add Cuba back to the terrorism list, are “not surprising.”

“The Trump administration began with a list and the list had everything that the Obama administration had done, and a primary goal of the Trump administration during the last four years has been to undo what President Obama did, or do what President Obama didn't,” Kavulich said in an interview with The Hill.

“And with respect to Cuba, there was a large quantity of items that President Trump could look at in terms of wanting to change,” he continued. “Primary among them was President Obama's removal of Cuba from the list of state sponsors of terrorism because that was integral to the process of reengagement with Cuba.”

The State Department defines a state sponsor of terrorism as a country that has “repeatedly provided support for acts of international terrorism.” States given this designation are subject to four main categories of sanctions: restrictions on U.S. foreign assistance, a ban on defense exports and sales, controls over exports of dual-use items and other financial restrictions.

Kavulich said the Trump administration has been successful in expanding the definition of “terrorism.” It is “no longer focused on something being blown up, someone being killed,” he said, but instead now can be based on “behavior, and particularly behavior toward one's citizens.”

In the State Department's 2019 “Country Reports on Terrorism” for Cuba, the agency argued that “Cuba maintains close and collaborative ties with designated state sponsors of terror such as Iran and North Korea,” and the nation “continues to harbor multiple fugitives who committed or supported acts of terrorism in the United States.”

In May of this year, the department notified Congress that Cuba was among the countries identified as “not cooperating fully” with U.S. counterterrorism efforts in 2019, marking the first year that Cuba had been certified as not fully cooperating since 2015.

However, American University professor Philip Brenner, who specializes in U.S. foreign policy toward Cuba and other Latin American countries, told The Hill that a Biden reversal of a Cuba terrorist sponsor designation would signal an internal review, in which intelligence experts would likely not find enough evidence of Cuba directly supporting terrorist actions.

Politically, Brenner said Biden would face pushback from Republican lawmakers if he were to walk back on Trump’s approach to Cuba. Florida Sen. Marco Rubio (R) in an opinion piece published in the Miami Herald last month said Cuba’s crackdown on peaceful dissidents should prevent Biden from returning “to a one-sided Cuba policy.”

Miami’s Florida International University in a 2020 poll found that 58 percent of Cuban Americans support maintaining diplomatic relations with the Caribbean nation and 65 percent believe all air travel to the country should resume.

Additionally, more than half of Cuban Americans in South Florida send remittances back to family members in Cuba, with 70 percent having close relatives or significant others living on the nearby island.

One of the survey’s authors, Guillermo Grenier, a sociology professor at the university, told The Hill that restoring remittances and travel may be Biden’s key focus in resuming Obama-era relations.

He said Secretary of State Mike Pompeo’s move on Cuba is political. “The only reason Pompeo is doing this is because it will make life for Biden quite difficult,” Grenier said. “There’s not going to be a big rush to do anything on Cuba, other than to resume remittances, which is having a horrible impact on the Cuban people, and travel once COVID is over.”

The FIU Cuba poll finds that Cuban voters have more support for hardline foreign policy toward Cuba, but that it does not rank among the top concerns for Cuban American voters in South Florida. According to the poll, economy and healthcare remain the two most important issues among those surveyed.

“Cubans are basically Republicans, so when you ask what are their priorities, they will answer like Republicans,” Grenier explained. “The importance of the economy is an American concern and a Republican priority.” Grenier also said that while Cuban voters now have shown support for Trump and other Republicans, this is more so a result of the party’s engagement with voters in South Florida, whose Cuban population Grenier says is the only true Republican stronghold in the Sunshine State.

Grenier noted that support for the trade embargo on Cuba went down to as low as 34 percent under Obama after he began opening relations. Under Obama, Republican party registration also declined, with more Cuban voters registering as independents.

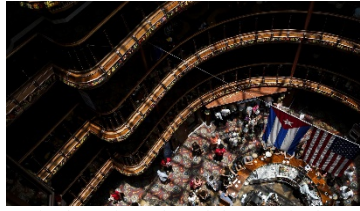
Grenier argues that under the Biden administration, Cuban American voters will have “less hardline” views toward Cuba, and will also “be more open to continued change.”

“What has to be kept in mind is in the polls, the hard-line has made a comeback, but there are plenty of soft spots in the hard-line, such as travel, consular services, remittances,” he said. “So, I do think if Biden changes the rules, we will see further changes among Cuban voters,” he added.

Tampa Bay Times
St. Petersburg, Florida
6 January 2021

Tampa-Cuba ties forged under Obama frayed under Trump. Now, it’s Biden’s turn.

Will the president-elect keep the status quo? Or will the man who served as Obama's vice president immediately re-establish policies of engagement?



A Cuban and an American flag hang in the atrium aboard the Carnival Paradise at Port Tampa Bay before the ship set sail for Havana in 2017. U.S. cruises to Cuba have since been banned. [Times (2017)]

By Paul Guzzo

TAMPA — Before Fidel Castro, before Communism, Tampa residents jokingly said their city was Cuba's northern-most province due to the ties they shared.

Cuban immigrants helped found Ybor City. Cuban tobacco was rolled in Tampa cigar factories. Tampa residents traveled to the island for weekend excursions.

The link was rekindled under President Barack Obama's efforts to normalize relations with Cuba. Cruises and commercial flights connected Tampa and Havana. Scientific collaborations and art exchanges began. But President Donald Trump rolled back most of Obama's Cuba policies, tightening restrictions and sanctions while considering placing the nation on its state-sponsored terrorism list.

Some cheered Trump's approach.

Others criticized it.

Now, both sides of the Cuba debate wonder what Joe Biden will do.

Will the president-elect maintain the status quo? Or will the man who served as Obama's vice president immediately re-establish policies of engagement?

Those who study the issue believe Biden will fall somewhere in between. Whatever he does will impact the Tampa Bay area, which has the nation's third-largest Cuban American population.

"I don't expect anything major to happen in the first 100 days, because Biden hasn't mentioned it," said Albert A. Fox Jr. who, as president of the Tampa-based Alliance for Responsible Cuba Policy Foundation, helps forge relationships with Cuba. "I think it will be in dribs and drabs during his term."

John Kavulich, president of the New York-based U.S.-Cuba Trade and Economic Council that studies the business relationship between the nations, said he sees a key difference between Obama and Biden.

Obama's Cuba initiative was a "legacy" policy, he said.

"What's the political value for Biden to be the second president landing at José Martí International Airport in Havana?" Kavulich asked. "And there is no political constituency that matters to president-elect Biden that is screaming for anything to be done. I think he will make changes, but it will be over time and be conditional."

Kavulich believes Biden will demand more from Cuba than Obama did. He pointed out that John Kerry, who helped orchestrate Obama's Cuba policy as secretary of state and is now part of the Biden administration as special presidential envoy for climate, has said normalization of relations did not bring about the results for which he'd hoped.

"It's fair to say that everybody shares a little bit of disappointment about the direction that the government in Cuba chose to go" after the normalization of U.S.-Cuba ties, Kerry told the *Miami Herald* in September. "Cuba seemed to harden down after the initial steps were taken."

Kavulich noted that Biden on the campaign trail hammered Cuba for human rights violations.

“There’s more political prisoners. The secret police are as brutal as ever,” Biden said during an October campaign stop in Miami.

And, as Trump did for four years, Biden tied human rights issues in Venezuela to their relationship with Cuba, Kavulich said.

“That likely means the Biden administration will make decisions on Cuba based upon what is happening in Venezuela,” Kavulich said. “Democracy and human rights in other countries was part of the Biden’s campaign ethos and will be tied to any Cuba policies.”

Tampa’s Rafael Pizano, who lobbies internationally for better human rights in Cuba, hopes that Biden demands “political diversity” rather than the one-party Communist system, “freedom of views independent of the state” and the “release of political prisoners” as “a show of good will.”

For that to happen, Biden must fully staff the U.S. embassy in Havana, said U.S. Rep. Kathy Castor, a Tampa Democrat in favor of better relations with Cuba.

In 2017, Trump slashed that staff following what remain mysterious brain injuries to diplomats. The State Department describes those as “sonic attacks” with microwave energy.

The cutbacks, Castor said, included “human rights officers on the streets.”

“Cubans are clamoring for freedom of expression,” she said, “and we don’t have the support they need on the island to promote their cause.”

Re-staffing the embassy would have other impacts.

Visas are no longer issued there. Instead, Cubans who want to visit the United States must obtain a visa through a trip to a U.S. embassy in a third country.

“The average Cuban cannot afford that,” Castor said. “That is keeping families apart.”

It’s also hurting scientific exchanges, said Dan Whittle, who directs the New York-based Environmental Defense Fund’s marine and coastal conservation projects in Cuba.

“Environmental cooperation needs to be a two-way exchange,” he said. “Cuban scientists need to be able to obtain visas to come to the United States.”

Those collaborations are especially important to Tampa Bay, Whittle said, because the region shares an ecosystem with Cuba.

Still, the partnership between Tampa’s Florida Aquarium and Havana’s National Aquarium has endured. They work together to save the coral reefs.

Cuban scientists visited Tampa during the Obama years.

Those meetings have been held remotely under Trump, even before the pandemic.

“In a world of connectivity and technology, sharing critical scientific data among our coral scientists is the most important aspect of our collective effort,” said Roger Germann, chief executive officer of The Florida Aquarium. “We continue to work together despite our physical distance.”

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has recently hinted that he wants to redesignate Cuba as a state sponsor of terror. Cuba spent decades on the list until Obama removed it.

If Trump returns Cuba to the list, the University of South Florida would be banned from academic collaborations with Cuba. Florida prohibits state universities from using state money for travel to countries designated as terrorism sponsors.

Biden could again remove Cuba from that list but not until the State Department conducts a formal review. Suzanne Carlson, the founder of Tarpon Springs' Carlson Maritime Travel, hopes Biden immediately re-establishes Obama's Cuba travel policies.

Visits to Cuba solely for tourism have been illegal for six decades, but Obama made travel there easier by establishing "people-to-people" visas that allowed Americans to visit for educational tours and cultural exchanges and without having to provide documented proof of such engagement.

"A boom of American tourists flocked to Cuba, which in turn helped foster new restaurateurs, new entrepreneurial thinking and a new hope," said Carlson, who booked clients on daily commercial flights from Tampa International Airport to Havana.

Critics said those visas allowed Americans to illegally visit beach resorts because requirements were fulfilled on the honor system. Trump ended them.

Trump also barred U.S. cruise ships from docking in Cuba, saying that the excursions financially supported an oppressive government.

Royal Caribbean and Carnival Corp. had offered cruises from Tampa to Havana.

St. Petersburg Mayor Rick Kriseman, who has flown to Cuba four times and helped bring Cuban artists to his city, said those cruises supported the Cuban people.

"To not have those cruise ships delivering visitors to Havana's doorstep is a huge economic impact to the private businesses," he said. "For example, where those cruise ships dock is right where there is an artisan market. Hundreds of people sold their work to the visitors."

Tampa City Councilman Bill Carlson wants the Biden administration to go big and allow trade with Cuba, something Obama fell short of doing.

Carlson is among those who believes Cuba's Port of Mariel will become a global shipping hub.

TC Mariel, which runs the Cuban port, previously told the *Tampa Bay Times* that Port Tampa Bay is its preferred U.S. partner because of its proximity to central Florida, home to regional distribution hubs.

"They want Tampa to be their gateway for Asian products to the United States," Carlson said. "This could transform Tampa's economy and make Tampa the business capital of Florida."

Biden would have to reverse a law prohibiting goods from being loaded onto a ship in Cuba and sent to the United States. That restriction includes items created in and coming from a third nation.

Fox of the Alliance said something as "simple" as rolling back Trump's restrictions on remittances could help the Cuban people "immensely." Americans are limited to sending \$1,000 per quarter to family in Cuba and can't send anything to non-family members. Remittances were unlimited under Obama.

Western Union closed hundreds of locations across Cuba due to recent U.S. sanctions on its Cuban partner company Fincimex. The Trump administration said Fincimex profits benefit the Cuban government. "The Cuban people rely on the remittances," Congresswoman Castor said. "They rely on their families in the United States, especially family in Tampa."

Fox said such a change can be made with an executive order during Biden's first days in office. "If he doesn't, the message is clear — he has the wrong people advising him on Cuba."

AFP

Paris, France

5 January 2021

Pompeo sugiere regreso de Cuba a la lista negra de patrocinadores del terrorismo



El secretario de Estado, Mike Pompeo, durante una visita a Bruselas en septiembre de 2019 afp_tickers

El jefe de la diplomacia estadounidense, Mike Pompeo, sugirió en una entrevista difundida el martes que quiere regresar a Cuba a la lista negra de estados patrocinadores del terrorismo, tildando de "malvado" al gobierno comunista de La Habana, que rechazó esta eventual movida de Washington.

En diálogo con Bloomberg News, Pompeo confirmó que el Departamento de Estado evalúa tomar esa medida antes de su salida del cargo el 20 de enero, frenando así un eventual acercamiento diplomático del futuro presidente estadounidense Joe Biden con La Habana.

"No hacemos públicas las decisiones que se tomarán sobre las designaciones, pero el mundo conoce la mano malvada de Cuba en muchos lugares", dijo Pompeo en declaraciones al programa de televisión del inversionista David Rubenstein.

Como "ejemplo perfecto" de esa intervención de Cuba, Pompeo destacó el firme apoyo al mandatario de Venezuela, Nicolás Maduro, a quien el gobierno de Donald Trump considera un dictador y ha intentado derrocar sin éxito, diciendo que La Habana ha "infligido un dolor masivo al pueblo venezolano".

"Es completamente apropiado que consideremos si Cuba de hecho patrocina el terrorismo. Y si es así, al igual que cualquier otra nación que brinde apoyo material a terroristas, (Cuba) también deben ser designada como tal y tratada de manera acorde con su comportamiento", aseveró.

El diario The New York Times informó la semana pasada que el Departamento de Estado ya elaboró una propuesta para incluir a Cuba entre los "Estados patrocinadores del terrorismo", pero no estaba claro si Pompeo la aprobaría.

El canciller cubano, Bruno Rodríguez, reaccionó en Twitter y aseguró que "de imponerse por capricho la campaña personal del Sec. Pompeo de incluir a Cuba en la lista de Estados Patrocinadores del Terrorismo, confirmaría que en EEUU es mayor la lealtad corrupta a intereses minoritarios que el compromiso en la lucha contra este flagelo internacional".

- Impacto económico -

Volver a ser considerado un estado patrocinador del terrorismo tendría un claro impacto económico para Cuba, dijo a AFP John Kavulich, presidente del Consejo Económico y Comercial Estados Unidos-Cuba, una organización que asesora a empresas estadounidenses sobre negocios en la isla.

"Las instituciones financieras tendrían otra razón para evitar transacciones con la República de Cuba", señaló, apuntando que el "mayor escrutinio" al que estaría sometida desalentaría las inversiones de gobiernos y empresas.

Además, "las compañías de seguros podrían suspender la cobertura de operaciones (para embarcaciones, barcos, aeronaves, etc.) y, de continuar, aumentar el costo de la cobertura", apuntó.

En 2015, en el marco de su política de acercamiento a Cuba, el antecesor de Trump, Barack Obama, retiró al país caribeño del listado de Estados patrocinadores del terrorismo, al declarar que los esfuerzos de medio siglo de Estados Unidos para aislar a la isla comunista habían sido un fracaso.

Pero Trump revirtió este descongelamiento del vínculo con Cuba apenas asumió en 2017, recrudeciendo el embargo vigente desde 1962 e imponiendo una batería de sanciones a su aliado Venezuela, lo cual le valió el apoyo electoral del crucial estado de Florida.

Biden, que fue el vicepresidente de Obama, ha dado lineamientos muy generales de cómo será su posición hacia Cuba, pero indicó que volvería a flexibilizar algunas restricciones, como permitir que los cubanoestadounidenses visiten a sus familias y envíen dinero.

El futuro gobierno de Biden podría eliminar a Cuba de la lista de patrocinadores del terrorismo, pero no sería en lo inmediato, ya que primero el Departamento de Estado tendría que realizar una revisión formal. Solo tres naciones permanecen en esta lista negra estadounidense, Irán, Corea del Norte y Siria, después de que Trump eliminara a Sudán el mes pasado.

CaribMagPlus

Nassau, The Bahamas

5 January 2021

Cuba's new single currency will bring pain to Cubans warns observer- is the Cuban government "confused" on the objectives?

By: Staff Writer

Cuba ended its dual currency economy on January 1, but a Cuban trade expert said that there will be "substantial pain" brought on the country as a result of it and a Floridian academic said the Cuban government seemed "confused" on the issue.

John S. Kavulich, president of the U.S.-Cuba Trade and Economic Council, Inc. in New York, said about the end of Cuba's dual currency exchange on January 1: "The general rule for a government seeking to implement what the Republic of Cuba is now doing- await a strong economy, robust foreign exchange reserves, and have low levels of unemployment.

Mr Kavulich added: "The Republic of Cuba has commenced the currency reunification during a pandemic, when tourism revenues have collapsed, when it has no foreign exchange reserves, when its exports have decreased and imports are challenging due to a lack of foreign exchange, its internal bureaucracy stifles economic and commercial efficiency, and the United States continues to implement sanctions upon it and upon Venezuela, which provides oil products to the Republic of Cuba."

"There will be substantial short-term to medium-term pain for the 11.3 million citizens of the country," said Mr Kavulich.

There was two currencies, both called peso. One was called the "Cuban peso" (in Spanish moneda nacional, ISO 4217 code: CUP) and the other is the Cuban convertible peso (ISO 4217 code: CUC, often called "dollar" in the spoken language), both currencies are subdivided into 100 centavos.

On January 1, Cuba eliminated the CUC and is keeping the CUP. Cuba set up the dual-currency system in 1994, when the country was reeling from the loss of subsidies from the Soviet Union, on which it had relied during the Cold War. Alongside the Cuban peso it created the CUC, a

convertible currency pegged to the dollar at one to one in hopes that this would prevent Cubans from dumping pesos in favour of dollars. Importers, which are state-owned, use CUC to obtain dollars on favourable terms, which makes imports cheap. Most Cubans, who work for the state, are paid in pesos. The change has taken effect on January 1 and the CUC will be removed totally from circulation in June, 2021.

Sounding some optimism however, Mr Kavulich said: “The currency unification is long overdue and once completed will enhance the country for its citizens and will leave the country more attractive for direct foreign investment.”

Cem Karayalcin, chairman of the department of economics at Florida International University, on the other hand said: “Well, the first thing to point out is that they seem to be quite confused. The ‘dollarisation’ they are talking about appears to be the unification of a dual fixed exchange currency system (meaning: instead of two fixed exchange rates, Cuba is moving to one unified fixed exchange).”

He added: “Both systems are reported to have the same exchange rate of \$1 to 24 Cuban pesos, so it is hard to see why there would be inflation by moving to a unified exchange rate.”

When a visitor goes to Cuba now they only have the CUP to contend with and no more hassling with vendors over the conversion of the CUC and how much it costs.

They can use US dollars, Canadian dollars, and Euros only at airports in Cuba. Actually, shops and restaurants at Cuban airports only accept foreign currencies. As reported by Al Jazeera, earlier this year, Cuba reallocated “dollar stores,” which let people buy goods like food, toiletries and electronics with bank cards loaded with US dollars or other foreign currency. That, in turn, let the government snap up those dollars to help deal with its liquidity crisis.

The use of US dollar had previously been banned in 2004 when the government created the CUC. The CUC has historically been used for state business and buying goods from abroad, but it can’t be taken out of the country. It is pegged 1:1 to the dollar but exchanged with the public at a rate of 24 to buy and 25 to sell.

For the average Cuban, one CUC is worth 25 times more than one CUP, and not everyone can get their hands on them. CUCs are used in businesses that involve foreign money — such as tourism or buying goods imported from abroad.

Mr Karayalcin said about the possibility of the Cuban central bank managing monetary policy moving forward and the convertibility of the currency: “There are two possibilities: If Cuba restricts the convertibility of its currency, its central bank can carry out independent monetary policy, and if they are not disciplined, they may print too much money, which will lead to inflation. If it allows full convertibility, its central bank will lose the ability to conduct independent monetary policy, but thereby avoid inflation as a fixed exchange rate with full convertibility will make it impossible to print money at will.”

Most Cubans who don’t work in the tourism sector are still paid in CUPs, and this dual system has created a lot of disparities, which is one reason why CUCs are being scrapped.

The Cuban government also announced it would increase government workers’ salaries and pensions to adjust for inflation. But private-sector workers won’t have those protections and will be able to afford less when paying with their new Cuban pesos than with their convertible ones.

Mr Karayalcin said however, “Regarding the ease with which they can have a unified fixed exchange rate system, it is important to note that almost every country in the world was on such a

system for decades before the 1970's and most countries in the developing world had this system up until very recently. It does not require much to do it.”

In announcing the currency unification plan, the Cuban government said it would publish the exchange rate for the Cuban peso daily on the Central Bank's website, meaning that it could potentially fluctuate rather than stay at its fixed rate. That's also new for the island.

In a speech earlier this month, Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel said the reforms were necessary “to go ahead with the transformations that we need to update our economic and social model”, Bloomberg News reported.

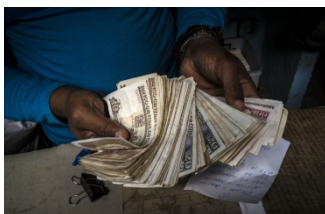
Dennik N

Bratislava, Slovakia

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Platy im zvýšia, ale na elektrinu mat' nebudú. Kuba konečne ruší systém dvoch oficiálnych mien

Kristina Böhmer



Kubánske pesos. Ilustračné foto – TASR/AP

Konvertibilné peso už nie je druhou oficiálnou menou na Kube.

Keď kubánsky prezident Miguel Díaz-Canel v sprievode šéfa komunistickej strany Raúla Castra 10. decembra oznámil reformy, ktorými mal v pláne zrušiť systém dvoch oficiálnych mien a viacerých výmenných kurzov, aby ekonomiku zdynamizoval, spustil v hlavách mnohých Kubáncov náročné matematické procesy.

Potrebovali si prerátať, či v roku 2021 budú mať šancu vyžiť.

Súčasnou reformou je síce zvyšovanie plátov a dôchodkov štátnych zamestnancov, ktorí na Kube tvoria až dve tretiny pracujúcich, no ide to ruka v ruku so zvyšovaním cien potravín, ropy, služieb či energií.

Na rozmýšľanie nemali veľa času. „Deň nula“, keď mali reformy začať platiť, bol prvý január.

„Začal som počítať a nemohol som spať“, povedal 51-ročný technik Ramón, ktorý pracuje v Havane v štátnom sektore, v obchode, kde opravuje elektroniku.

Po novom bude zarábať tritisíc pesos, no ak bude jeho rodina míňať toľko elektriny ako doteraz, tak len tá ho bude stáť viac ako dvetisíc pesos. „Ak si k tomu pridáte ceny na poľnohospodárskom trhu, ceny čohokoľvek na čiernom trhu, ja neviem, ako dopadneme, a nemám nikoho, kto by mi poslal doláre zo zahraničia,“ dodal Ramón.

O čo ide?

Kuba po prvýkrát od revolúcie v roku 1959, po ktorej sa k moci dostal bývalý diktátor Fidel Castro, devaluje svoju menu kubánske peso a úplne ruší druhú oficiálnu menu, takzvané konvertibilné peso, ktoré Kubánci dostávali na výmenu jedna k jednej za americký dolár.

Ide o najvýznamnejšie ekonomické zmeny od 90. rokov, keď Kuba reformovala po páde Sovietskeho zväzu.

V tom čase sa krajina zmieta v hlbokoj hospodárskej kríze a komunistický režim sarozhodol zoficiálnit' ako druhú menu americký dolár, ktorý sa už aj tak používal na čiernomtrhu, aby sa krajina viac otvorila zahraničnému obchodu.

Teraz sa Kuba zmieta v najväčšej hospodárskej kríze posledných desaťročí a riešením mábyť práve zjednotenie mien, ktoré má ekonomiku zdynamizovať a zjednodušiť prezahranických investorov.

Vymieňajte doláre

Kubánci majú teraz pol roka na to, aby si zamenili všetky svoje konvertibilné pesá zakubánske. Za jedno konvertibilné peso dostanú 24 kubánskych.

Podľa prezidenta sa týmto má ekonomika zdynamizovať a naštartovať. Podľa agentúryPrensa Latina ešte v októbri povedal, že „zjednotenie meny a viacerých výmenných kurzovnie je magickým riešením ekonomických a finančných problémov, ale má to viesť krajinuk zvýšeniu produktivity práce a efektívnejšiemu výkonu produktívnych síl“.

Kubánska komunistická vláda už dlhšie hovorila o zrušení konvertibilného pesa. Aj mnohíekonómovia upozorňovali, že by to krajine prospelo.

Ani kubánske peso, ani konvertibilné peso sa nedá zameniť mimo Kuby a systém dvojitejmeny zbytočne sťažuje export krajiny, podporuje import a komplikuje analyzovanie korporátnych profitov. Ale načasovanie asi nemohlo byť horšie.

Pandémia plus sankcie

„Všeobecným pravidlom pre vládu, ktorá chce zaviesť to, čo zavádza Kubánska republika, jezaviesť to v čase silnej ekonomiky, silných devízových rezerv a nízkej mierynezamestnanosti,“ povedal pre Denník N prezident Americko-kubánskej obchodnej ekonomickej rady John Kavulich.

Ani jedno z toho nie je kompatibilné s tým, čo sa s ekonomikami takmer všetkých krajínsveta deje v čase globálnej pandémie covidu-19.

Kuba má podľa Výskumného inštitútu Johnsa Hopkinsa od začiatku pandémiepotvrdených vyše 12-tisíc infikovaných koronavírusom a menej ako 150 obetí. Skutočnéčíslna však budú pravdepodobne iné.



82-ročná zdravotná sestra na dôchodku Feridia Rojasová sa skrýva v kartónovom dome, na ktorom má nápis v španielčine „Somdoma“, kým kráča do obchodu. Foto – TASR/AP.

K čomu ešte v prípade Kuby treba pripočítať aj sankcie, ktoré na krajinu opäť uvalilamerický prezident Donald Trump minulý rok. Jeho nástupca Joe Biden plánuje sankciezjemniť. Ešte v októbri povedal, že chce „zvrátiť neúspešnú Trumpovu politiku, ktorá spôsobila škody Kubáncom a ich rodinám“.

Trump uvalil v apríli minulého roku sankcie na Kubu, Nikaraguu a Venezuelus odôvodnením, že bude bojovať proti socializmu, komunizmu a porušovaniu ľudskýchpráv.

A tak s týmto cieľom znovu zaviedol limity na finančné objemy, ktoré môžu kubánskiAmeričania posielat' svojim chudobnejším rodinám na Kubu, ako aj na frekvenciu, akočasto môžu peniaze posielat'. Zaviedol aj nové reštrikcie týkajúce sa cestovania na Kubu.

Reformy v tomto zmätku

„Kubánska republika začala zjednocovať menu počas pandémie, keď sa prepadli príjmy z turizmu, keď krajina nemá žiadne devízové rezervy, keď export klesá a import je výzvoupne nedostatok devízových rezerv, keď domáca byrokracia potláča ekonomickú a komerčnú efektivitu a keď USA pokračujú v zavádzaní sankcií voči Kube a Venezuele, ktorá Kubu dodáva ropu,“ vysvetlil Kavulich.

V roku 2020 sa v dôsledku svetovej pandémie ekonomika Kubánskej republiky prepadla o 11 percent.

„No zjednotenie meny tu malo byť už dávno, a keď bude hotové, situácia domácich sa zlepšila krajina bude atraktívnejšia aj pre zahraničných investorov,“ dodal Kavulich.

Translation:

Their salaries will increase, but they will not have electricity. Cuba is finally abolishing the system of two official names

The convertible peso is no longer the second official currency in Cuba.

When Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel, accompanied by Communist Party leader Raúl Castro, announced reforms on December 10 that he planned to abolish the system of two official currencies and multiple exchange rates to boost the economy, he launched demanding mathematical processes in the minds of many Cubans.

They needed to reconsider whether in 2021 they would have a chance to make a living.

Although the reforms include increasing the salaries and pensions of civil servants, who make up two-thirds of workers in Cuba, this goes hand in hand with rising food, oil, services and energy prices.

They didn't have much time to think. "Day Zero", when the reforms were to take effect, was January 1.

"I started counting and I couldn't sleep," said Ramon, a 51-year-old technician who works in Havana in the public sector, in an electronics repair shop.

After the new one, he will earn 3,000 pesos, but if his family spends as much electricity as before, it alone will cost him more than 2,000 pesos. "If you add the prices on the agricultural market, the prices of anything on the black market, I don't know how we're going to end up, and I don't have anyone to send me dollars from abroad," Ramón added.

What is it about?

For the first time since the 1959 revolution, after which former dictator Fidel Castro came to power, Cuba devalues its Cuban peso currency and completely abolishes the second official currency, the so-called convertible peso, which Cubans received in exchange for one to one for the US dollar.

These are the most significant economic changes since the 1990s, when Cuba reformed after the fall of the Soviet Union.

At that time, the country was in the throes of a deep economic crisis, and the communist regime decided to officialize the US dollar, which was already used on the black market, as the second currency, in order to open the country more to foreign trade.

Cuba is now struggling in the biggest economic crisis of recent decades, and the solution is to unify the currencies, which should make the economy more dynamic and simpler for foreign investors.

Exchange dollars

Cubans now have half a year to exchange all their convertible pesos for Cuban ones. For one convertible peso, they get 24 Cuban.

According to the president, this should boost and start the economy. According to Prensa Latina, he said in October that "the unification of currency and multiple exchange rates is not a magical solution to economic and financial

problems, but should lead the country to increase labor productivity and more efficient performance of productive forces."

The Cuban communist government has long talked about abolishing the convertible peso. Many economists have also warned that the country would benefit.

Neither the Cuban peso nor the convertible peso is interchangeable outside Cuba, and the dual currency system unnecessarily complicates the country's exports, encourages imports and complicates the analysis of corporate profits.

But the timing probably couldn't be worse.

Pandemic plus sanctions

"The general rule for a government that wants to implement what the Republic of Cuba is introducing is to do so in times of strong economy, strong foreign exchange reserves and low unemployment," John Kavulich, president of the US-Cuban Trade and Economic Council, told Denik N.

None of this is compatible with what is happening to the economies of almost every country in the world during the global covid-19 pandemic.

According to the Johns Hopkins Research Institute, Cuba has confirmed more than 12,000 coronavirus infections and less than 150 victims since the beginning of the pandemic. However, the actual numbers are likely to be different.

In addition, in the case of Cuba, the sanctions imposed on the country again by US President Donald Trump last year must be added. His successor, Joe Biden, plans to ease sanctions. Back in October, he said he wanted to "reverse Trump's failed policy of harming Cubans and their families."

Trump imposed sanctions on Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela last April on the grounds that it would fight socialism, communism and human rights abuses.

To this end, he has reintroduced limits on the amount of money that Cuban Americans can send to their poorer families in Cuba, as well as on the frequency with which they can send money. He also introduced new restrictions on traveling to Cuba.

Reforms in this confusion

"The Republic of Cuba began to unify the currency during a pandemic, when tourism revenues fell, when the country has no foreign exchange reserves, when exports decline and imports are challenged by a lack of foreign exchange reserves, domestic bureaucracy suppresses economic and commercial efficiency and the US continues to impose sanctions to Cuba and Venezuela, which supplies oil to Cuba," Kavulich explained.

In 2020, due to a global pandemic, the economy of the Republic of Cuba fell by 11 percent.

"But the unification of the currency should have been here a long time ago, and when it is done, the situation of domestic ones will improve and the country will be more attractive to foreign investors as well," Kavulich added.

Impact on families

In the beginning, however, it will be different.

"11.3 million people in the country will experience short-term or medium-term pain," Kavulich said when asked who the reforms would hurt the most.

11.3 million is the entire population of Cuba. Everyone will feel the negative impact in the beginning.

Whether it's those who have always earned only in Cuban pesos and don't have enough money saved to tighten electricity, or those who have received all or at least part of their salary in convertible pesos and now have to exchange them all for Cuban pesos.

For example, only the price of the mentioned electricity has increased fivefold. Few people can afford that.

However, President Miguel Díaz-Canel tried to reassure people that they would reduce the increases. "We watch with interest and respect what bothers people. What needs to be revised will be revised and what needs to be repaired will be fixed," he told the BBC.

Salaries of civil servants has increased fivefold, but given the increase in food prices, services and energy is not negligible. In addition, salary increases do not affect two million out of seven million people who work in private companies or illegally or not at all.

Cuban economists estimate that about 40 percent of state-owned companies will operate at a loss anyway, and although some will benefit from the reforms, many will go down. In addition, inflation will appear in three-digit terms.

VN Express

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Trump có thể đưa Cuba vào danh sách tài trợ khủng bố

Chính quyền Trump có thể đang cân nhắc đưa Cuba vào danh sách tài trợ khủng bố, động thái nhằm xáo trộn chính sách đối ngoại của Joe Biden.

Nguồn thạo tin hôm 30/12 cho biết việc Tổng thống Trump liệt Cuba vào danh sách tài trợ khủng bố không những cản trở chính sách đối ngoại của Biden, còn thúc đẩy cơ hội cho các đảng viên Cộng hòa tranh cử ghế thượng nghị sĩ ở Georgia.

Động thái này cũng cho phép Trump tự hào rằng ông đã đảo ngược một sáng kiến quan trọng từ thời Obama cũng như tạo ra khó khăn cho Cuba. Đây là viễn cảnh sẽ làm hài lòng phe cánh hữu ủng hộ Tổng thống và được coi như "phần thưởng" cho những người Mỹ gốc Cuba đã bỏ phiếu cho ông ở Florida.

"Điều này giống như ném một quả bom mùi vào tiệc cưới, dư âm rất mạnh mẽ. Nó cũng giúp Trump có thể khẳng định rằng ông đã đảo ngược được chính sách của Obama", John Kavulich, chủ tịch Tổ chức Kinh tế và Thương mại Mỹ-Cuba có trụ sở tại New York, nhận định về thông tin.

Nhà Trắng hiện chưa bình luận về nguồn tin.



Tổng thống Trump tại Bãi cỏ phía Nam của Nhà Trắng ngày 12/12. Ảnh: Reuters.

Một trong những thành tựu được ca ngợi mang tính bước ngoặt của Obama là ông đã chấm dứt khoảng thời gian đóng băng với Cuba, khôi phục quan hệ ngoại giao với Havana, nối hạn chế đi lại giữa hai nước và trở thành lãnh đạo Mỹ đầu tiên tới thăm quốc gia này kể từ năm 1926.

Cựu tổng thống Obama cũng gạt Cuba khỏi danh sách các quốc gia tài trợ khủng bố. Bộ Ngoại giao Mỹ khi ấy cho biết họ vẫn giữ "quan ngại và bất đồng với loạt chính sách, hành động của Cuba, song chưa tới mức tài trợ khủng bố".

Tuy nhiên, kể từ khi nhậm chức tháng 1/2017, Trump thắt chặt các hạn chế đối với Cuba mà Obama đã nới lỏng. Tháng 6/2019, chính quyền Trump siết hạn chế đi lại với Cuba, loại bỏ hình thức đi lại theo nhóm với mục đích giáo dục.

Mỹ cũng không cho phép tàu chở khách, tàu giải trí, máy bay tư nhân và công ty đến Cuba. Washington nói rằng động thái này nhằm gây áp lực hơn nữa đối với chính phủ Cuba vì họ ủng hộ Tổng thống Venezuela Nicolas Maduro.

Dù Biden đã được đại cử tri đoàn bầu làm Tổng thống đắc cử với 306 phiếu, Trump vẫn chưa nhận thua và dường như có "khuấy đảo chính trường" trước khi rời Nhà Trắng. Trong khi đó Biden đã tìm cách dùng hàng loạt "[quyết định phút chót](#)" được Trump đưa ra những ngày cuối nhiệm kỳ.

Ngọc Ánh (Theo *Los Angeles Times*)