

Proposal for an International Project

Responding to the Retreat from Normalization between Cuba and the United States: RESIST Hostility, REVERSE Deterioration, and RECOVER Rapprochement Process by Soraya M.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The proposed eighteen-month project is intended to respond to the current state of U.S.- Cuban relations in a way that enables the two countries to resist the current hostility, reverse the deterioration in positive engagement, and recover the process of rapprochement between them. It would develop a holistic analysis based on a set probable scenarios about the future of U.S.- Cuban relations, and would conclude with policy recommendations. The recommendations would emanate from meetings with six sets of focus groups composed of Cuban, North American and international scholars and practitioners who have been able to engage empathetically. The estimated budget for the project is \$185,000.

CONTEXT

In the two years following the dramatic December 17, 2014 announcements by Presidents Raul Castro and Barack Obama, Cuba and the United States reestablished full diplomatic relations, created several working groups to build cooperation on issues of mutual interest, and signed nearly two dozen bilateral agreements. The results appeared to confirm assertions by advocates of normal relations that the interests of both countries were best served by engagement. It was also evident that meaningful engagement was possible

because negotiators were able to empathize with each other, to place themselves in their adversary's shoes and view their own country's behavior from the perspective of the other. In addition, the new relationship strengthened constituencies favoring engagement in both capitals. However, it was fragile, because it was based on executive agreements that could be abandoned solely either country's head of state.

Indeed, by the mid-point in the third year of Donald J. Trump's administration, his decisions and hostility toward Cuba undermined cooperative U.S.-Cuban relations so significantly that they teetered on the brink of collapse. The U.S. diplomatic presence in Cuba is weaker than at any time since the U.S. Interests Section opened in 1977. The Trump administration also ended the Obama administration's practice of allowing senior U.S. officials meeting with their Cuban counterparts, while working-level diplomats struggled to maintain practical conversations with their Cuban counterparts on issues of mutual interest. Meanwhile, senior U.S. officials poisoned the bilateral atmosphere with accusations against Cuba that their own investigators could not verify. With no functioning consular section at the U.S. embassy, Washington ended the fiscal years 2017 and 2018 in violation of the 1994-1995 and 2017 U.S.-Cuban migration agreements by issuing fewer than half the number of obligated immigrant visas (15,597 instead of 40,000). The agreements had prevented any major migration incidents for 24 years. President Trump also

added to existing restrictions on travel by U.S. citizens, increased the denials of non-immigrant visas to Cubans, limited remittances, and tightened the embargo by choosing not to waive Title III of the 1996 Helms-Burton Act.

At the same time, factors that contributed to the Cuban-U.S. rapprochement between 2014 and 2016 changed in a way that may make them less likely to engender positive engagement in the near future. New governments in Colombia and Brazil, new leadership

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in the Organization of American States, and less willingness by the United States to respond to pressure from Western Hemisphere neighbors may change the U.S. calculation of how rapprochement with Cuba serves its regional interests. Chinese and Russian engagement with Cuba may trigger U.S. concerns in ways that could negatively impact efforts to improve relations. In Cuba, the new leadership may feel less secure in exposing Cuba to unfettered U.S. access, and may need to pay greater heed to opponents of normalization who warned about malevolent U.S. intentions lurking beneath an outstretched hand.

In light of this context, the proposed project will address three main questions: (1) How might further deterioration in the U.S.-Cuban relationship be prevented? (2) In anticipation of a new administration that would seek to improve relations, what steps could be taken now to provide the basis for reversing the deterioration. (3) What will be necessary to recover the momentum toward full normalization between Cuba and the United States? In short: how to RESIST the current hostility, how to REVERSE the deterioration in the relationship, and how to RECOVER the process of rapprochement between Cuba and the United States?

GOAL

The goal of the eighteen-month joint cooperative project between Cuban, U.S. and international scholars and practitioners is to develop a holistic analysis about the future of U.S.-Cuban relations that would support a broad set of policy recommendations related to three main analytic components: (1) The relative influence of key factors and actors in both countries, the Western Hemisphere, and internationally that are positive or negative drivers of normalization. (2) The policy priorities for each country that might offer positive or

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negative incentives to a process of rapprochement. (3) The variety of mechanisms that could promote empathy between Cuba and the United States, including engagement between scientists, doctors, engineers, agronomists, artists, business people, nongovernmental organizations, state and city-level officials, and students and educators from both countries.

Recommendations would emanate from meetings with a six sets of focus groups composed of Cuban, U.S. and international scholars and practitioners who have been able to engage empathetically. The analysis and policy ideas would be presented in a variety of fora – public and academic meetings, journals, social media, op-eds, and a single report distributed to

government officials in both countries. One intention would be to help national, state and local policy makers and nongovernmental actors from both countries to consider new ways to serve their common interests by expanding areas of cooperation.

The project would also contribute to our knowledge about the importance of empathy in international relations, which is a subject about which there is almost no literature. With its focus on how experiences in engagement overcame legacies of distrust to produce empathetic dialogues and tangible results, the project may open pathways for the exploration of confidence-building measures that can reduce international antagonisms.

METHODOLOGY

The project will be managed by a principal investigator and two deputies. It will begin with the production of three analytical papers that examine three questions: (1) How did historical, political, security and juridical variables act contingently to shape decisions in the United States, Cuba, and among other international actors to bring about the Cuban- U.S. rapprochement from 2014 to 2016? (2) How did these variables act to undermine

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rapprochement from 2017 to 2019? (3) How are these variables likely to shape decisions in the next three years?

It will then assemble six focus groups made up of Cuban, U.S. and international scholars and practitioners who have engaged empathetically in their areas of expertise, which could include communication, health care, agronomy, ecology, culture, commerce, international law, governance, or education. Each group will examine the lessons that can be derived from their experience, the ways in which their experiences could be replicated, and the ways in which their engagement could be deepened to include new activities.

On the basis of the analytic papers and reports from the focus groups, the project managers will meet with a group of scholars to develop a set of recommendations.

POSSIBLE PARTICIPANTS

Cuba:

- • Soraya M. Castro Mariño
- • Others TBD

U.S.:

- • Philip Brenner
- • Others TBD

International:

- • Edy Kaufman
- • Others from Mexico, Caribbean, South America, Europe TBD