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**NORMALIZATION OF US-CUBAN RELATIONS:
OBAMA DOCTRINE AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY
IN THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE**

Introduction

Normalization of US-Cuban relations, which was announced at the end of 2014 surprised experts, politicians and ordinary people. The talks between representatives of the two governments, taken through the Vatican, did not bring, so far, full resumption of relations and removal of the economic blockade of Cuba, but bring these goals closer. In 2015 both countries resumed diplomatic relations at the rank of embassies.

Strained relations between the US and Cuba after the victory of the Cuban revolution were a permanent element of the destabilization of international security in the Western Hemisphere. During the Cold War, this destabilization was a function of the East-West confrontation (Cuban missile crisis, 1962 could, it seems, lead to rejection of the logic of MAD – mutual assured destruction). The Cuban Revolution and its consequences threatened the hegemony of the United States in the Inter-American system. The threat was caused the Soviet military bases in Cuba, strengthening the Cuban army and by the revolutionary example that inspired actions by many armed leftist groups in Latin America. At the height of the Cold War almost all Latin American countries in the region, encouraged by the US, contributed to the isolation of Cuba

Since the end of Cold War the importance of Cuba as a Western Hemisphere entity hostile to the United States has diminished radically. Havana's position strengthened only partially after 2000 with the creation of the Cuban-Venezuelan alliance. In this article I will try to prove that the continuation of the confrontational and hostile US-Cuban relations after the collapse of the Eastern bloc was an exceptional and "unnatural" phenomenon from the perspective of realistic school of international relations, both for Washington and Havana. This uniqueness and abnormality is only reinforced by the difference in potential of both entities. From the US perspective normalization

with Cuba has not been initialized for reasons of national security. The so-called Obama Doctrine presupposes that the United States do not risk anything, and reserve the right to return to the previous policy if diplomatic measures fail. The Cuban government, however, aims at retaining the existing political system on the island, obtaining greater external legitimacy and normalizing relations with the neighboring superpower and therefore gives up ideology in favor of geopolitical realism.

I would also like emphasize that the constructivist perspective of international relations shows that the states teach each other the perception of its international partners, and can change their own identity. In the case of Cuba, its identity does not have to grow out of the recognition of the United States as an empire, which threatens the security of the island, especially when we consider the time that passed since the most serious confrontation, which dates back more than half a century.

US-Cuban relations during the Cold War and the war on terrorism

Since becoming an independent state at the beginning of the twentieth century Cuba occupied a special place in the foreign policy of the United States. It was conditioned by several factors. First of all, the strategic importance (location and geographic neighborhood) and economic ties. The state was an important component of US hegemony in Central America and the Caribbean. The two countries were connected by international treaties and constitutional ties that limited the sovereignty of the newly formed state, making Cuba quasi protectorate of the United States (Schultz 1998, p. 151). Currently still functioning US naval base guarding the entrance to the Caribbean Sea was established on the territory of Cuba (Guantanamo). Cuba is the largest island in the Caribbean Basin, what makes it a zone of special sensitivity for the vital interests of the United States (Gawrycki 2007, p. 296).

The importance of Cuba has increased dramatically during the Cold War. The radicalization of the Cuban Revolution (1959) led to the rupture of diplomatic relations between the US and Cuba and the economic embargo imposed by the United States. Cuba established a political-military alliance with the Soviet Union, an unique alliance within Latin American countries. US attempted to overthrow Castro's regime through Cuban counterrevolutionaries, during the invasion of the island in 1961. The fear of foreign intervention prompted the Cuban authorities to strengthen military cooperation with the Soviet Union to a level unprecedented in the Western Hemisphere, as evidenced in the installation of Soviet medium-range missiles on the island. This led to

1962 Cuban missile crisis the culmination of threats to international security on a global scale in the East-West confrontation. After the failure of the military option the United States has undertaken a diplomatic offensive, aiming to the exclusion of Cuba from the Inter-American system, which is based on the Organization of American States (OAS). US requested the exclusion of Cuba from the OAS because of the installation of “Marxist-Leninist government”, in Havana which was contrary to the Inter-American principles.

Since the Charter of OAS did not foresee such a possibility, the majority of the members of the organization concluded that “the current Cuban Government, as a result of their actions, put itself beyond the margins of the Inter-American system” (Dobrzycki 2002, p. 90). As a result, almost all the countries in the region broke off diplomatic and consular relations with Cuba. Havana responded with radicalization of international politics of Cuba, which materialized in inspiration and open support of leftist guerrillas, primarily in Latin America. In 1967 OAS has adopted several anti-Cuban resolutions and sanctions “until the Cuban government ceases its policy of intervention and aggression” (ibidem, p. 91) (the only country that never joined these actions was Mexico).

It was only in the 70s that countries throughout the region began to adopt the concept of political pluralism and accept free choice of political system by the states of Latin America, what allowed gradual and slow rebuilding of relations with Havana. During the presidency of Jimmy Carter (1977-1981) it seemed that even the United States were willing to consider to normalize the relations with Cuba, what could be preceded by the so-called baseball diplomacy (Gawrycki 2005, p. 127-132). However, existing tensions in the East-West relations, Cuba’s support for Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and the Cuban military involvement in Africa prevented the rapprochement between Washington and Havana.

Retightening in US-Cuban relations occurred during the rule of president Ronald Reagan. In 1982, the US Senate authorized the president to use force in order to counter the Cuban influence in the Latin American region. The main area (however not direct) of US-Cuban confrontation was Central America and the Caribbean (due to internal conflicts in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, Grenada). In 1984, so called Kissinger Commission for the Central America stated that the Soviet-Cuban influence in the Western Hemisphere affected the global balance of power; it was unacceptable to create Soviet military base in Nicaragua and the Central American conflicts should be regarded as one of the manifestations of East-West confrontation. United States strengthened

propaganda activities against Cuba, the result was the launch of Radio and Television Marti that is still operating from Florida.

From the United States Cold War perspective revolutionary Cuba was a threat to international security on many planes. The most important was the Soviet military presence on the island and maintenance of close relations with other countries of the communist bloc. Cubans was also accused of “export of revolution” to Latin America (“continental strategy”, which meant support and inspiration of subversive leftist armed organizations, which were seeking to take power in several Latin American countries). US also criticized Cuban military presence in Africa, mainly in Angola.

The perception of Cuba as an entity destabilizing international security had changed after the Cold War. From the United States perspective other issues become important, political transformation of Cuba after the expected fall of Fidel Castro’s regime being one them. It was expected that preparation of plans for “humanitarian intervention” in the event of civil war in Cuba would be necessary. But Cuba still was seen as a threat to US security for several reasons: as a safe haven for terrorists, including the Basque ETA; as a state maintaining contacts with the communist guerillas in Colombia, considered by the US as terrorists; as a country that may have chemical and biological weapons; as a close ally of other countries accused of supporting terrorism – Libya, Iraq, Iran.

Probability of traditional (military) threat to international security in relation to the entire Latin American region decreased. The important became the risk of “unconventional” threats: weak and failing states, organized crime, violating the principles of democracy. The US considers as particularly important to defend democracy and protect human rights. The weakness of some countries in the region was of special concern. To prevent the threat of the fall of the Latin American countries and the loss of control over borderlands “no man land” the concept of “effective sovereignty” was established. In the same period the OAS recognized terrorism, narcobusiness, reinforcement and transfer of weapons, territorial disputes, anti-personnel mines, natural disasters (from this list only affect Cuba reinforcement and transfer of arms and mines – Cuba has not ratified the Ottawa Convention of 1997) as the most important threats of the hemispheres security (Gawrycki 2005, pp. 105, 131).

United States continued its policy towards Cuba despite the collapse of the Eastern bloc. Under the Cuban Democracy Act of 1992 (so-called Torricelli Act) and the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act 1996 (so-called Helms-Burton Act) the US Congress had tightened the embargo against the island. Helms-Burton Act was directed against third countries, which would maintain business relations with Cuba. In 2004

president G.W. Bush restricted policy on the money transfers from Cuban emigrants in the United States to the island even more. Latin American states opposed to such measures and called for the gradual inclusion of Cuba to the Inter-American institutions, yet still frequently criticized human rights violations in Cuba in front of the UN Human Rights Commission. Although Cuba gradually normalized relations with all countries of the western hemisphere except the US but still did not participate in all institutions of the Inter-American system (the Cubans were not invited to the Summits of the Americas, the Cuban government was excluded from the OAS system).

After the attacks of September 11 2001 some members of the Bush administration and Cuban diaspora in Miami claimed that Cuba is a part of an international terrorist network. Despite these claims US government did not put it on the “updated” list of countries of the “axis of evil”. Fidel Castro clearly distanced himself from any association with terrorists and stated that “the territory of Cuba will never be used to attack on Americans and Cuba will do everything to prevent such actions” (Gawrycki 2005, p. 131).

In 2002, for the first time in the history, the United States formed the Northern Command (U.S. Northern Command), which covered Mexico and the part of Caribbean and excluded this area from the Southern Command, which covered the rest of Latin America. This decision emphasized the strategic importance to the national security of the United States of the region of Cuba's location. In the same year, Cuba ratified the Treaty of Tlatelolco (banning nuclear weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean). Havana said that the threat of invasion by the United States is still very serious, but decided to join the treaty, to make the whole of Latin America a nuclear weapons free zone (Gawrycki 2005, p. 132).

Obama Doctrine: normalization in the spirit of pragmatism and realism

The administration of President Barack Obama, who had during the election campaign emphasized the change in the approach to many international issues relative to the Republican predecessor, brought New hope for change in US policy towards Cuba. In 2008 Obama announced *New Partnership for the Americas* (*A New Partnership For The Americas*, 2008). A set of US policy objectives towards southern neighbors included the fight against drug trafficking, international gangs, terrorism, the fight against poverty, hunger, disease and global warming and supporting democracy. In the context of Cuba Obama

said that “a key component of the plan of promoting freedom and democratic change in Cuba will be aggressive and fundamental bilateral diplomacy” (Maroszek 2009).

Already in February 2008, during debate with Hillary Clinton, Obama spoke about the need for talks with the Cuban authorities without any prerequisites (*ibidem*). The United States had to take into account the attitude of Latin American allies, who for a long time have pressured Washington to lift sanctions against Cuba. A similar position was expressed by majority of the members of the United Nations. Key issues in relations with Cuba which were waiting for a solution by the new administration were the embargo, establishing of high level official contacts, abolition of the restrictions to travel to the island and to transfer money there by Americans of Cuban origin.

First signs of re-evaluation of the Cuban government by Washington appeared soon, despite the fact that Cuba was still on the US list of states sponsoring terrorism: US Department of State report described in 2009 Cuba as a country that “no longer actively supports armed struggle in Latin America and other parts of the world”, documented “no evidence of terrorist-related money laundering or terrorist financing activities,” and determined that Cuba “has not provided safe haven to any new US fugitives wanted for terrorism” (Erikson 2010, pp. 25-26).

Definite steps to normalize relations with Cuba have been taken only in 2014. The media named the change of policies towards Cuba and Iran as the Obama Doctrine. President Obama explained his policy toward still unfriendly countries in this way: “It’s a simple principle: get involved but do not give up any of our faculties (...) For example, Cuba. We can try out the possibility of some agreement that would have a positive outcome for the Cuban people without much risk for us. This is tiny country (...) And if the result will not be any good, we can always adjust our policy” (Mizrahi 2015).

Thus, using the indisputable military superiority the United States could risk a diplomatic option: “We are powerful enough to check the possibility of an agreement without exposing us to the danger” (Cubanet 2015). During secret negotiations, both sides agreed to remove certain obstacles. Washington removed Cuba from the list of states sponsoring terrorism and released Cuban spies from American prisons and Cuba released the American activist Alan Gross, who was accused of espionage and also released the majority of political prisoners on the island.

What could be the result of the change of policy towards Cuba on the US domestic politics? Surprisingly – the decisions taken by Barack Obama was met with lukewarm reaction of the American public. It is apparent during the election campaign in 2016. Even in Florida, where the importance of the elections is usually colossal, normalization

process does not mobilize large Cuban diaspora, an unthinkable fact just a decade before. Even Floridian Marco Rubio, seeking the Republican nomination, rarely mentioned Cuban issues. Anti-Castro Cuban emigrants organizations also retain a reserve to open criticism of normalization.

Obama emphasizes multilateralism, support of international organizations and a restrictive interpretation of international law, as well as “soft power”, which include the United States – “leading from behind”. But Obama’s recent moves indicate that diplomacy is not the only tool in US policy towards Latin America. Marines still have their place in it. In the middle of 2015 two hundred American soldiers have been deployed in Honduras under the “humanitarian mission”, where already 400-strong marines unit stationed, officially involved in anti-drug operations. Not hiding left-wing sympathies, American analyst James Petras said on this occasion that the presence of Marines in the region may be a sign of “creating a platform of military intervention in Latin America” (Zamorano 2015).

According to Obama’s vision, the US will remain the world leader defending democracy and market economy, but will act pragmatically, without messianic idealism that marked his predecessors. In the case of Cuba it is important to take into consideration the opinion of Latin Americans who demand the abolition of Havana’s long isolation. Normalization with Cuba is less important for the vital interests of the US than with Iran, despite the geographical proximity of the two countries. The ideological (symbolic) component growing out of the Cold War is the most important factor in US-Cuban relations. Currently, Cuba poses no threat to the US (neither military nor ideological), and therefore the current state of affairs should be rectified. Withdrawal of restrictions more than 20 years since the fall of the Soviet Union is a natural step. Obama took the initiative, that his predecessors feared and postponed mainly due to the requirements of the internal policy of the United States.

In April 2015 at the VII Summit of the Americas, for the first time attended by President of Cuba, Barack Obama said: “The United States look to the future, we do not want, and certainly I do not want to be hostage to ideology (...) When I showed up for the first time at the Summit I promised to open a new chapter in the region. I became involved in creating a new era of cooperation (...) We took here in a historical moment (...) With the change in relations with Cuba, the United States deepens its relations with the continent (...) I’m not interested in theoretical arguments but tangible results for the people. Relations between the US and the Americas are the best for many decades” (Infobae América 2015).

And now it's time for an embargo (or blockade?)

Establishment of diplomatic relations does not end the problems between US and Cuban. Questions of possible compensation for the nationalization of American property on the island, freedom of travel, and most of all economic sanctions imposed by the US on Cuba remain unresolved. Blockade imposed by the Congress was aimed at isolation of Cuba and weakening its economic development; it was a sanction aimed at forcing the Cuban government to respect human rights and adopted in response to confiscation of property of Americans and American companies by the revolutionary government in Havana after 1959. Meanwhile, in the post-Cold War era (since 1992) the UN General Assembly voted 23 times for a withdrawal of blockade.

During the ceremony of reopening of the US embassy in Havana, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Cuba used the term “blockade” 11 times in reference to the US embargo on the island established more than 50 years earlier. The term blockade allows Cubans to stress the illegality of sanctions due to violation the sovereignty of Cuba and other countries, especially after Torricelli and Helms-Burton laws adopted by Congress in the 90’s, which reinforced the pressure on the island through the impact on others entities undertaking economic cooperation with Cuba. The embargo has served the Cuban authorities to militarize revolutionary rhetoric and claim that Cuba is “at war” with the United States. The term blockade thus became part of Cuban propaganda, aimed at equalizing US sanctions with other anti-Cuban US activities (espionage, sabotage, invasion of the Bay of Pigs). Cuban agencies estimate that economic losses caused by the blockade of the island totaled in 2013 at 116.8 billion USD. Cubans argue that the blockade has caused serious material, mental and spiritual damage to Cuban people, having a negative impact on their economic, cultural and social development (Zaldívar Diéguez).

In practice, for both countries the embargo/blockade has rather symbolic and propagandist than economic significance. In this context it is not surprising that the United States is a major exporter of agricultural products to Cuba (rice, poultry, wheat, soya). Although Cuba’s main trading partners are China and Venezuela, the United States is in fifth place (6.6% of imports). The embargo is not violated, American goods arrive to Cuba as a humanitarian aid (beside food also medicaments are exported), which was allowed by the government of President Clinton in 2000. The only inconvenience to Havana in this regard is that it has to pay for US delivery in cash, but this arrives on the

island with a broad stream through the remittances of Cubans living in the US who send to their families in Cuba approx. one billion dollars each year. Moreover, despite the sanctions, approx. 100 000 Americans from the north visited Cuba annually (Ochoa 2015).

Despite Republican Congressional majority opposition to withdraw the sanctions, American public favors ending of the embargo. Yet US official stance towards the embargo (so far) remains unchanged. John Kerry, US Secretary of State said that “there is no way that the US Congress lifted the embargo if the Cubans do not take steps in matters of (freedom) conscience” (PAP 2015). In November 2015, both countries agreed to establish a bilateral commission, which will continue the talks on unsettled and difficult issues, which Kerry specified as “human rights, security issues, the matter of fugitives (who are on the wanted list of US justice system) and economic claims of both sides”. Both sides also defined a list of problems in the sphere of security, requiring bilateral cooperation: combating terrorism, drug trafficking, human trafficking, money laundering, smuggling, cyber-attacks and other cross-border crime.

Ending

Maintenance of tension between the US and Cuba after the Cold War had primarily a symbolic dimension for both sides (Wallace 2015), contradicts realism of foreign policy and of international relations. Cuba was and is still a small, economically weak country adjacent to the global superpower. It is difficult to conclude that the resumption of relations caused primarily by economic interests and security reasons, at least from the US perspective. Gone are the days when Cuba had a relatively strong army and financed and supported left-wing groups on the continent to expand its influence in Latin America. Even today it is difficult to overestimate the impact of Havana on the left-wing governments in the region. The left-populist governments of Hugo Chavez, Evo Morales and Rafael Correa did not arise as a result of Cuban inspiration but as a result of internal political evolution in Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador. Cubans do not want to export their political system and Havana’s relations with these governments are strong only in symbolic terms. So we can understand the presence of Cuban doctors and teachers in the countries that are political allies of the island. Cuban ability to carry external humanitarian aid, and not only in the Latin American region, is also important. Cuba also offers scholarships for students from developing countries in the name of international solidarity.

Closer ties can be observed only in the case of the Cuban-Venezuelan relationship: despite the fact that Caracas is (yet) in the role of protector in the economic sphere, it is probable that Cubans (still) play some role in *chavistas'* decision-making in Venezuela. In this context it should be recalled that during the long confrontation with the United States, Cuba built a powerful apparatus of security services inclusive of widely considered to be effective intelligence. It is worth noting that the process of negotiations between the US and Cuba has probably began shortly after the death of Venezuelan President Chavez and coincided with the tightening Washington's policies to Caracas.

Cuban willingness of normalization may easily be explained by realistic school of analysis of international relations. Latin American representatives of "peripheral realism" postulated after the end of the Cold War the abandonment of confrontational attitudes and acceptance of its international position in order to maximize economic benefits by Latin American countries (and therefore also by Cuba, which special geopolitical importance after the collapse of the bipolar order drastically decreased). In extreme simplification it can be summarized in the statement "the future of Latin America can be imagined only in the side of the United States" (Gerhard Drekonja-Kornat, in: Gawrycki 2006, p. 30).

As Hans Morgenthau wrote in his *Politics Among Nations* (1948), political realism assumes that only rational foreign policy is correct, allowing to minimize risks and to maximize benefits. Thus, by maintaining tense relations with the United States Cuba can only expect more risks and disadvantages than benefits. The Cuban government has been aware of this for a long time and since Fidel Castro, a great leader of the revolution, has been pushed into shadows it is easier to take such a decision. And even more so due to support by the Venezuelan ally increasingly becoming problematic.

On the other hand, constructivism in international relations gives another interpretation of US-Cuban rapprochement. If we assume that to understand its international role, it is important for a state to shape its own identity and interpret mutual perceptions of participants in international relations, we can say that the United States does not have to be seen by the Cubans as an empire and Cuba as the object of paternalistic politics in Washington. Otherwise: Cuba does not have to base their identity on treating the US as a real or potential enemy (Łaciński 2015, pp. 131-132). Acceptance of non-confrontational yet asymmetric relationship between the US and Cuba, becomes the part of overcoming the last, unnecessary relict of the Cold War, which disturbs international order and, to some extent, international security in the Western Hemisphere.

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Strained relations between the US and Cuba after the victory of the Cuban revolution were a permanent element of the destabilization of international security in the Western Hemisphere. During the Cold War, this destabilization was a function of the East-West confrontation. Since the end of Cold War the importance of Cuba as a Western Hemisphere entity hostile to the United States has diminished radically. Definite steps to normalize relations with Cuba have been taken only in 2014. The media named the change of policies of the US towards Cuba (and Iran) as the Obama Doctrine. This article will try to prove that the continuation of the confrontational and hostile US-Cuban relations after the collapse of the Eastern bloc was an exceptional and “unnatural” phenomenon from the perspective of realistic school of international relations, both for Washington and Havana.

Key words: *Obama Doctrine, Cuba, Latin America, International Security*

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