

Trump to Reverse Cuba Policy, Reinstate 'Regime Change' Goals

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Global Research, June 19, 2017

[teleSUR](#) 15 June 2017

Region: [Latin America & Caribbean, USA](#)

Theme: [Global Economy](#), [Law and Justice](#),
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Trump plans to announce the policy change at a Miami theater named after Manuel Artime, a Cuban exile leader of the CIA-backed Bay of Pigs invasion.

U.S. President Donald Trump is expected to fulfill his campaign promise to curtail the 2014 re-engagement deal between Washington and Havana, tightening pressure on Cuba and dashing the hopes of those who had hoped for a thaw in relations between the two neighbors.

Trump will lay out the new U.S. policy on Cuba Friday in a Miami speech that will convey a reinforced ban on U.S. tourism to Cuba and strengthened vetting of travelers to the Caribbean nation within authorized categories, according to officials. The plan will also restate the regime change goals of the 1996 Helms-Burton Act. According to Politico, Trump plans on announcing the policy change at a Miami theater named after Manuel Artime, a leader of Brigade 2506 that attempted to overthrow the Cuban Revolution during the CIA-backed Bay of Pigs invasion.

The Bay of Pigs Veteran Association backed Trump in last year's election in hopes that he would reverse President Barack Obama's policies, the first such endorsement in the organization's history.

Washington's policy reversal has also been pushed by right-wing Republican politicians like Florida Senator Marco Rubio and Representative Mario Diaz-Balart, along with other members of a [shrinking Cuban exile community](#) in South Florida who remains bent on overthrowing Cuba's socialist government. According to Rubio, the policy change is meant to set back those advocating for the lifting of the 56-year-old blockade against Cuba.

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and the head of USAID will be instructed to review so-called “democracy development programs” in Cuba to ensure compliance with U.S. federal law, potentially meaning a renewed push for regime change funding by the agencies.

The policy will also outlaw trade with the Armed Forces Business Enterprises Group, the holding company of the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces. The new policy may mean that companies such as the Marriott will no longer be allowed to complete their Obama-era business deals with GAESA, such as the purchase of the Havana Hotel.

“This new policy reverses the Obama administration’s support for the communist Castro regime and its military apparatus, and instead aligns the United States with the Cuban people,” a summary provided Thursday by the White House said.

Earlier this month before the National Assembly of People’s Power, Cuban President Raul Castro denounced the use of “arbitrary and unjust” sanctions levied by Washington against socialist governments in Cuba and Venezuela, noting that such “aggression” represents “imperial political and economic interests (trying) to prevent the exercise of self-determination by its people.”

While normalization will be frozen, U.S. officials say that Trump will stop short of shuttering embassies and breaking off the diplomatic relations restored in 2015 after over half a century of hostilities from the U.S. White House spokesperson Sarah Huckabee Sanders was unaware of whether Trump would nominate an ambassador.

The resumption of direct U.S.-Cuba flights will also continue, although the newly restrictive policy will likely staunch the flow of tourists to the country.

According to Cuba's National Office of Statistics and Information, in the month of May, nearly 285,000 U.S. citizens visited Cuba under the 12 protected permit categories established by the Obama administration, roughly equaling the total number of visitors in the entire year 2016.

Trump's justification of the partial reversal will hinge on Washington's human rights claims against the government, and the claim that the easing of restrictions hasn't had the desired "regime change" effects desired by anti-Cuban elements on Capitol Hill.

The Cuban government has long faced alleged human rights complaints from the White House for its rejection of Washington's dictates in the field of politics, economy, social policy and foreign relations.

On Tuesday, 14 Democratic senators sent a letter to U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson urging the White House to consider expanding normalization efforts with Havana, noting the economic and national security benefits of warmer relations with Cuba.

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