

## **Trump rolls back Obama's 'one-sided' Cuba policy, announces restrictions**

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**Washington:** Thrusting the US and Cuba back on a path toward open hostility, President Donald Trump on Friday vowed to roll back his predecessor Barack Obama's signature Cuba policy, saying it was "one-sided" and his administration will seek a "much better" deal for the Cuban people and America. Denouncing the island's communist government, Trump clamped down on some commerce and travel but left intact many new avenues Obama had opened.

### **Trump roll backs Obama's 'one-sided' Cuba policy**

The Cuban government responded Friday evening by rejecting what it called Trump's "hostile rhetoric." Still, Cuba said it is willing to continue "respectful dialogue" with on topics of mutual interest.

"Effective immediately, I am canceling the last administration's completely one-sided deal with Cuba. I am announcing today a new policy just as I promised during the campaign. And I will be signing that contract right at that table in just a moment," Trump told a cheering crowd of Cuban Americans in Miami, Florida.

"Our policy will seek a much better deal for the Cuban people and for the United States of America. We do not want US dollars to prop up a military monopoly that exploits and abuses the citizens of Cuba. Our new policy begins with strictly enforcing US law," he said.

Trump predicted a quick end to President Raul Castro's regime, he challenged Cuba to negotiate better agreements for Americans, Cubans and those whose identities lie somewhere in between. Diplomatic relations, restored only two years ago, will remain intact. But, in a shift from Obama's approach, Trump said sanctions on Cuba would stay in place until a long list of prerequisites was met.

"We will not lift sanctions on the Cuban regime until all political prisoners are freed, freedoms of assembly and expression are respected, all political parties are legalised and free and internationally supervised elections are scheduled elections," Trump said.

"We will very strongly restrict American dollars flowing to the military, security, and intelligence services that are the core of the Castro regime. They will be restricted. We will enforce the ban on tourism. We will enforce the embargo," he said.

"We will take concrete steps to ensure that investments flow directly to the people so they can open private businesses and begin to build their country's great, great future, a country of great potential," he said amidst a loud applause from the audience.

Trump said his actions bypassed the military and the government to help the Cuban people form businesses and pursue much better lives.

"We will keep in place the safeguards to prevent Cubans from risking their lives to unlawful travel to the United States. They are in such danger the way they have to come to this country. And we are going to be safeguarding those people," he said.

Trump said his administration will expose the crimes of the Castro regime and stand with the Cuban people in their

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struggle for freedom.

"Because we know it is best for America to have freedom in our hemisphere, whether in Cuba or Venezuela, and to have a future where the people of each country can live out their own dreams," he said.

He alleged that for nearly six decades, the Cuban people had suffered under the Communist domination.

To this day, Cuba is ruled by the same people who killed tens of thousands of their own citizens, who sought to spread their repressive and failed ideology throughout our hemisphere and who once tried to host enemy nuclear weapons 90 miles from our shores, he charged.

"The Castro regime has shipped arms to North Korea and fueled chaos in Venezuela. While imprisoning innocents, it has harbored cop killers, hijackers and terrorists. It has supported human trafficking, forced labor and exploitation all around the globe," he said.

"This is the simple truth of the Castro regime. My administration will not hide from it, excuse it or glamorise it. And we will never, ever be blind to it. We know what's going on and we remember what happened," he said.

Declaring Obama's pact with Castro a "completely one-sided deal," Trump said he was canceling it. In practice, however, many recent changes to boost ties to Cuba will stay as they are. Trump cast that as a sign the U.S. still wanted to engage with Cuba in hopes of forging "a much stronger and better path."

### **Cuba rejects Trump's 'hostile rhetoric'**

In a statement released Friday evening on government-run websites and television, Cuban President Raul Castro's administration said Trump's speech was "loaded with hostile rhetoric that recalls the times of open confrontation."

The lengthy statement went on to strike a conciliatory tone, saying Cuba wants to continue negotiations with the US on a variety of subjects. "The last two years have shown that the two countries can cooperate and coexist in a civilized way," it said.

Embassies in Havana and Washington will remain open. U.S. airlines and cruise ships will still be allowed to serve the island 90 miles south of Florida. The "wet foot, dry foot" policy, which once let most Cuban migrants stay if they made it to US soil but was terminated under Obama, will remain terminated. Remittances from people in America to Cubans won't be cut off.

But individual "people-to-people" trips by Americans to Cuba, allowed by Obama for the first time in decades, will again be prohibited. And the US government will police other trips to ensure travelers are pursuing a "full-time schedule of educational exchange activities."

The changes won't go into effect until new documents laying out details are issued. Once implemented Trump's policy is expected to curtail US travel by creating a maze of rules for Americans to obey. The policy bans most financial transactions with a yet-unreleased list of entities associated with Cuba's military and state security, including a conglomerate that dominates much of Cuba's economy, such as many hotels, state-run restaurants and tour buses.

Unable to persuade Congress to lift the decades-old trade embargo, Obama had used his power to adjust the rules that

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implement the embargo to expand built-in loopholes. Obama and his aides argued that commerce and travel between the countries, which has blossomed since he relaxed the rules, would make his policy irreversible.

Ben Rhodes, the former deputy national security adviser who negotiated Obama's opening with the Cubans, said it was disappointing Trump was halting the momentum that had built but added that it could have been worse.

The Castro government is certain to reject Trump's list of demands, which includes releasing political prisoners, halting what the U.S. says is abuse of dissidents and greater freedom of expression. Refusing to negotiate domestic reforms in exchange for U.S. concessions is perhaps the most fundamental plank of Cuba's policy toward the US

Cuba functioned as a virtual US colony for much of the 20th century, and even reform-minded Cubans are highly sensitive to perceived U.S. infringements on national sovereignty. The US severed ties with Cuba in 1961 after Fidel Castro's revolution, and spent decades trying to either overthrow the government or isolate the island, including by toughening an economic embargo first imposed by President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Obama announced in December 2014 that he and Castro were restoring ties. Less than a year later, the US Embassy in Havana re-opened, and Obama paid a historic visit to Havana in 2016.

- (With agencies)