



US on Verge of Removing Cuba From List of State Sponsors of Terrorism

Cuban-Americans warn it would be a grave mistake

John Burger

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The United States may be about to remove Cuba from its list of state sponsors of terrorism, but some Cuban-Americans see that as a grave mistake.

Carlos Eire, the T. Lawrason Riggs Professor of History & Religious Studies at Yale University and author of a memoir about growing up during the Cuban Revolution, *Waiting for Snow in Havana*, pointed out that Cuba has had two illegal arms shipments seized in the past year and a half, one to North Korea, the other to China.

In addition, he said:

- It has deals with Iran (including sending nuclear experts to Iran); It has re-opened a Russian spy station on the island;
- It is allowing China to build satellite stations on the island; It has ties to Hamas, Hezbollah, etc. and to FARC in Colombia;
- It is in charge of repression in Venezuela;
- It is exporting its phony "socialism" to all of Latin America.

The [BBC](#) and other media outlets are saying that removing Cuba from the list would pave the way for the two nations to reopen embassies. But Eire, who grew up in Cuba, pointed out that the countries' respective "interest sections" have "functioned no differently from embassies."

"The U.S. 'interest section' in Castrogonia occupies the old embassy building and the ambassador's mansion is the same as in pre-Castro days," he said. "For quite a few years, up until today, the number of diplomatic employees attached to the US 'interest section' has been greater than the number in pre-Castro days. Relatively speaking, it's a very large operation. Contact has been constant, and talks, and negotiations, etc."

Alberto de la Cruz, managing editor of the [Babalu Blog](#), which covers Cuba, said that removing

Havana from the state sponsors of terrorism list would be based on political expediency.

"The Obama administration's obsession with appeasing the brutally repressive regime in Cuba and score brownie points with Latin America's leftist ideologues who are diligently working to eradicate basic civil rights in the region is as immoral as it is incomprehensible," de la Cruz said.

"Cuba's dictatorship continues to harbor and protect known international terrorist fugitives, including an American who is on the FBI's most-wanted list (Joanne Chesimard). Furthermore, Cuba's government continues to support and provide cover for terrorist regimes in the Middle East as well as terrorist organizations such as FARC, ETA, ELN, etc."

Nevertheless, the move would push forward a normalization of relations that reportedly had significant help from Pope Francis. President Obama and Cuban President Raul Castro spoke about that goal in simultaneous speeches December 17.

"I think it makes sense," said Ian Vasquez, director of the Cato Institute's Center for Global Liberty and Prosperity. "I don't know that there is any substantiated evidence that Cuba actively sponsors terrorism. And there is no evidence that it threatens US security. I'm not sure it is a good idea to maintain a terrorism list in any case. Only four countries are on it, but other countries such as Pakistan, which at least harbors terrorists, are not. Sometimes the national interest is better served using other, more effective foreign policy tools."

Obama and Castro are expected to meet in the coming days while attending the Summit of the Americas in Panama. In the meantime, Secretary of State John Kerry and Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez held closed-door discussions in Panama.

"Secretary Kerry and Cuban Foreign Minister Rodriguez had a lengthy and very constructive discussion this evening. The two agreed they made progress and that we would continue to work to resolve outstanding issues," a senior US official said.

The meeting was historic in itself, but Obama's meeting with Castro would be the first meeting of a US and Cuban president since Dwight D. Eisenhower met with Fulgencio Batista.

Senator Ben Cardin, D-MD, a leading member of the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, said the State Department had recommended removing Cuba from the list of state sponsors of terrorism.

The move was "the result of a months-long technical review" and would be "an important step forward in our efforts to forge a more fruitful relationship with Cuba", he said. The BBC explained:

Cuba is one of four countries still on the US list of countries accused of repeatedly supporting global terrorism; Iran, Sudan and Syria are others.

It was first put on the list in 1982 for offering sanctuary to militant ETA Basque separatists and Colombian Farc rebels. ...

If Mr Obama opts to accept the state department's recommendations, Congress would have 45 days to decide whether to override him.

It won't go without debate. Sen. Marco Rubio, R-FL, issued a statement in which he said, "It is a grave mistake to de-list Cuba from the state sponsors of terrorism list, one that will further embolden the regime to step up their actions against America's interests."

"I think these talks are inevitable but my concern is that the US is rushing too much and has given major concessions to Cuba, and I do not think we have received something comparable in return," said Enrique Pumar, associate professor and chairman of the Sociology Department at the Catholic University of America. "In all negotiations there should be reciprocity and, at least for an outsider, there does not seem to be much of that going on."