

CUBA STUDY GROUP

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STATEMENT BY THE CUBA STUDY GROUP REGARDING THE CONCLUSION OF PRESIDENT TRUMP'S CUBA POLICY REVIEW

President Trump's announcement today indicates how far the Cuba policy debate has moved, despite intense pressure from scarce congressional hardliners. Many of the gains of normalization remain intact. At best, this is a partial victory for those who hoped to reverse increased bilateral ties. However, the Cuba Study Group reiterates its view that the completely free flow of people, ideas, information, and goods helps, rather than hinders, the cause of meaningful reform on the island. We therefore urge President Trump to reject the half-measures he proposed today and pursue a policy of full normalization with the island.

Restricting U.S. travel isolates Cubans from knowledge of American political, economic, and human rights norms. Also, it is tendentious to purportedly champion freedom in Cuba by limiting the freedoms of U.S. citizens. The U.S. does not impose similar travel restrictions on any other country, including North Korea and Iran. 81% of Americans, 75% of Cuban-Americans, and virtually all Cubans support the freedom of U.S. citizens to travel to Cuba. Claiming to support a "better deal" for Americans, Cubans, and Cuban-Americans, while ignoring their desires, is highly disingenuous.

Restricting U.S. travel as the Trump administration has proposed will also harm Cuban private business owners far more than the government. Even if not broadly applied, the threat of further enforcement will have negative repercussions on Cubans on the island. Individual U.S. travelers utilize privately-rented rooms at a higher rate than visitors from any other country. Beyond lodging, many small businesses (restaurants, shops, etc.) depend on U.S. and other visitors for their livelihood. Limiting people-to-people travel once again to organized groups will significantly impact the Cuban people the President says his measures are intended to support. Moreover, contrary to the stated policy's objectives, this measure will push remaining U.S. travelers into tours overseen by the Cuban government, rather than allowing real paths for citizen-to-citizen exchange.

President Trump should narrowly interpret the prohibition against trade with organizations tied to the Cuban military. There is a vast difference between a Fortune 500 company forming a joint venture with the Cuban military and a U.S. humanitarian worker buying a water bottle at a government-run store. Regardless, the task of enforcement and oversight will be onerous. We note the irony of a Republican administration burdening Americans with regulations of little clarity or use.

The limited scope of the review's conclusions represents an admission of defeat by previously intransigent hardliners. In statements defending the new policy, they adopted pro-normalization positions they once scorned: the importance of continued diplomatic engagement and of supporting Cuba's private sector. Nonetheless, the tone of hostility in the President's address may jeopardize crucial government-to-government ties on issues of mutual concern—counterterrorism, counter-narcotics, and migration cooperation—that administration officials ostensibly want to preserve. We urge President Trump to pursue a policy of full normalization that benefits the U.S. economy, serves U.S. interests, and can help place Cubans on a path to a better future.

The Cuba Study Group is a non-profit, non-partisan organization, comprised of business and professional individuals with a deeply rooted love for Cuba and the Cuban people. We aim to put our collective experience in leadership skills, problem solving, and wealth creation at the service of the Cuban people. We aim to facilitate change, help empower individuals and promote civil society development.

Our mission is to help facilitate peaceful change in Cuba leading to a free and open society, respect for human rights and the rule of law, a productive, market-based economy and the reunification of the Cuban nation.