

# Off the “Terrorist List”: Cuba, Obama and the US State Department

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*Policy made in a state of delirium is rarely good. US policy towards Cuba has veered between paranoia and mania since the island state fell out of the orbit of Washington’s brutal and promiscuous designs.*

On Tuesday, President Barack Obama edged further along the long road of rapprochement and rehabilitation by announcing his intention to remove Cuba from the American government’s list of nations deemed sponsors of terrorism. For the acronym minded, the SSOT (State Sponsors of Terrorism) list will have one less member.

Placing Cuba on the list during the years of the Reagan administration was a formality, albeit an idiotic one deemed necessary in a Cold War climate. In moving the Cold War settings into a different gear, Reagan officials considered it appropriate to place Castro’s regime on the most contrived of lists. Support for the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the Basque Fatherland and Liberty movement (ETA) in Spain, were deemed good enough.

The hoops in terms of taking Cuba off that list are extensive. The rescission of that status is filled with bureaucratic constrictions that say nothing about regimes and conduct. Like an application form, Cuba has to satisfy a range of criteria imposed upon it by statute, a form of state sanctioned gobbledygook.

Much of this was outlined by US State Department officials via Teleconference on April 14. The President submits a report to Congress with a minimum of 45 days before the proposed rescission comes into effect certifying that “the Government of Cuba has not provided any support for international terrorism during the preceding six-month period” and “that the Government of Cuba has provided assurances that it will not support acts of international terrorism in the future.”[1]

As late as January 6, 2015, the *National Review Online* would insist that the books on Cuba were being cooked to make it appear “kinder-and-gentler”. [2] Support for FARC, as outlined in the “April 2014 State Department Country Reports on Terrorism” spoke of being confined to facilitating travel for peace talks. The ETA presence in Cuba had also lessened with time. But, authors for the NRO insisted that, “Terrorists, murderers, and other violent criminals were being protected, well fed, and supported by the Communist regime.” Much like Washington’s policies then – everyone has their sanctioned fugitives, their unprincipled allies.

The article was added to the Congressional Record with enthusiasm by Miami Republican Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, who continues to be sceptical of the Obama stance towards Havana. “Just like the Taliban 5 trade with Bergdahl,” argued Ros-Lehtinen in February

somewhat histrionically, “the President has established a dangerous precedent that the United States does in fact negotiate with terrorists, putting a target on every American’s back and jeopardising our national security.”[3]

Fascinatingly banal, given that the US has, in fact, been engaging in those very acts of negotiation since it became a power of consequence. Even the evangelical Reagan facilitated negotiations with the bug bear of Shia sponsored terrorism, Iran, over the matter of hostages in the Iran-Contra scandal.

An indication about how flawed the list is can be gathered from countries which have been off it. Saudi Arabia, the most problematic of allies, has funded, as it still does, militias and groups with a strong, and murderous, anti-American bias. That sort of perverted policy doesn’t count for listing in the corridors of power in Washington. We help them to wound us, which is a form of exotic self-harming.

While the terrorist designation has always been arbitrary, it has come with pernicious consequences. These were highlighted in the farcical events surrounding the cessation of services to foreign missions on the part of M & T Bank of Buffalo. It was the one bank that engaged Cuban diplomats in Washington. Ceasing such operations placed the Cubans in a pickle – no other banks were willing to offer their good offices, the reason being that Cuba was still officially a “sponsor of state terrorism”. [4] The result: bundles of cash were being used in transactions.

Similar problems were facing Cuba’s efforts to re-open embassies. Normal diplomatic relations were continuing to prove distinctly abnormal. As Gustavo Machin, deputy director of American affairs at the Cuba Foreign Ministry explained to reporters in February, “It would be a contradiction, the re-establishment of diplomatic relations, if Cuba still remains on the list of countries sponsoring international terrorism.” [5]

Various Republicans, notably those who see the Castros as devil’s incarnate, see no reason why the relationship should be warmed, or the terrorist credential removed. They are at odds with the commercial lobbies which are smacking their lips at the prospect of allowing “free enterprise to flourish,” to use the words of the Chamber of Commerce. Former Florida Governor Charlie Crist is seeing money flow like a river into the state. “Being able to open up relations with the Cuban people and to have more trade not only benefits all America but in particular the state of Florida being only 90 miles away.” [6]

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Notes

[1] <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2015/04/240697.htm>

[2] <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/395772/yes-cuba-state-sponsor-terror-yleem-poblete--jason-i-poblete>

[3] <http://www.local10.com/news/rep-ileana-roslehtinen-statement-on-new-us-policy-on--cuba/31097172>

[4] <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/28/world/americas/cubas-spot-on-us-terror-list-gums-->

[up-restoration-of-relations.html](#)

[5] <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/28/world/americas/cubas-spot-on-us-terror-list-gums--up-restoration-of-relations.html>

[6] <http://www.cnn.com/2015/04/15/politics/cuba-embargo-republicans-business-obama/>

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