

Options for U.S. Military Engagement with Cuba

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Abstract

While the role of the U.S. military in the evolving U.S.–Cuba relationship is severely limited in the near term, a broad range of possibilities exist for how the relationship might evolve in the future. Forecasting how the strategic domestic or international environment will act or react to future internal or external stimulus is almost impossible. The purpose of this paper is thus to assess the evolving U.S.–Cuba relationship and provide security cooperation options under a range of different assumptions about the environment that the military will face in the future. To analyze possible options for military engagements, this work employs three planning scenarios—based on current U.S.–Cuba policy—regarding the U.S.–Cuba strategic-political-military environment in the foreseeable future. These scenarios are: 1) a permissive environment where both governments welcome multidimensional engagements; 2) a mixed environment where one nation is more receptive to expanding engagements than the other; and 3) a restricted environment where both countries are reluctant to engage.

Options for U.S. Military Engagement with Cuba

In Cuba, we are ending a policy that was long past its expiration date. When what you're doing doesn't work for 50 years, it's time to try something new ... we have to be creative, thoughtful, and continue to update our policies.

—President Barack Obama¹

President Barack Obama's December 2014 announcement ordering the restoration of full diplomatic relations with Cuba and the opening of an embassy in Havana for the first time in more than a half-century swept aside one of the last vestiges of the Cold War. While the role of the U.S. military in the evolving U.S.–Cuba relationship is severely limited in the near term, a broad range of possibilities exist for how the relationship might evolve in the future. Forecasting how the strategic domestic or international environment will act or react to future internal or external stimulus is almost impossible. As Secretary of Defense Robert Gates noted in February 2011 to a group of senior Cadets, with respect to planning for the future in general:

When it comes to predicting the nature and location of our next military engagements, since Vietnam, our record has been perfect. We have never once gotten it right, from Grenada, Panama, Somalia, Haiti, Kuwait, Iraq, and more, we had no idea a year before any of these missions that we would be so engaged.²

As an strategic advisors, developing acceptable and feasible options is fundamental to facilitating the future alignment of military ways and means to support the achievement of our national strategy. It is therefore important to consider how the U.S. military might contribute to U.S.–Cuba engagement under a range of possible future scenarios concerning the U.S.–Cuba relationship.

The purpose of this paper is thus to assess the evolving U.S.–Cuba relationship and provide effective security cooperation options with respect to Cuba under a range of

different assumptions about the environment that the military will face. To do so this work employs three planning scenarios regarding the future U.S.–Cuba strategic-political-military environment, based on current U.S.–Cuba policy in the foreseeable future:

- 1) a permissive environment where both governments welcome multidimensional engagements.
- 2) a mixed environment where one nation is more receptive to expanding engagements than the other.
- 3) a restricted environment where both countries are reluctant to engage.

Historical Role of the Military in U.S.–Cuba Engagement

The United States and Cuba have long been intertwined in their political and economic relationships. For more than a century, U.S. involvement with Cuba focused mainly on use of U.S. Armed Forces to achieve foreign policy goals and objectives. Therefore, the premise of moving current U.S.–Cuba relations forward without appropriately leveraging the military element is politically and strategically dangerous.

The first episode of the abstruse political-military relationship between the United States and Cuba occurred in 1898 when the United States declared war on Spain following the sinking of the Battleship Main in Havana Harbor. This triggered Spain to lose control of its territorial possessions in the region, and consequently led to the establishment of the naval base at Guantanamo Bay as a key geographic location in the Caribbean.³ In 1912 President Theodore Roosevelt ordered U.S. military forces into Cuba to protect U.S. economic interests, and to support the conduct of free and democratic elections.⁴ Further, the U.S. government vehemently supported the regime of Fulgencio Batista. Historically stereotyped as an iron-fisted dictator, Batista was a

pawn of the U.S. government and a right-hand man of the U.S. mob during his time in power from 1933 to 1959.⁵ Batista's abrupt departure into exile in 1958, partly due to loss of support by the U.S. government, along with domestic uprising in 1959, opened the door to a young Fidel Castro, who went on to be considered by many as the most controversial leader in modern Cuban and Latin America history.

Ironically, shortly after Fidel Castro came to power, he began acting aggressively toward American private investors, considering them a destabilizer of the regime. During a three-and-a-half-hour public speech in 1960, Castro emphasized: "We'll take until not even the nails of their shoes are left ... we will take American investment penny by penny until nothing is left."⁶ At that moment the book value of U.S. business enterprises in Cuba was far greater, both in dollars and per capita, than was typical at the time in the rest of Latin America as a whole.⁷ Castro's strategic posture became a direct threat to U.S. foreign investments in the island, categorically one of the United States' most sensitive political-economic national interests. In April 1961, President John F. Kennedy authorized a military expedition to overthrow Castro from power. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Department of State (DoS), and Joint Chiefs of Staff approved the execution of what the agencies' leaders believed would be the definitive strike: a military invasion consisting of 1,400 men, most of them Cuban⁸ exiles, attempting to invade their homeland and oust Fidel Castro.⁹ The invasion, however, did not go as planned due to a lack of land, sea, and air support and synchronization. As a result, Castro's troops, who largely outnumbered the invaders, forced their surrender after less than 24 hours of fighting.¹⁰ This embarrassment became the fundamental basis for the development of future U.S.–Cuba foreign policy.

Thanks in part to the Cuban military's success and proven loyalty in defending the regime, the later never hesitated to use it for domestic oppression; Castro's favorite tool for maintaining command and control, and apprehending and incarcerating political opposition, was the *Fuerzas Armada Revolucionarias (FAR)*. This military group—in English: the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces—employed ruthless use of force to “control” domestic disturbances that erupted in Cojimar, Regla, and La Habana shortly after the end of the Cold War.¹¹ The regime subsequently reformed the military to maintain totalitarian control of domestic security and economics in order for Castro to remain in power.

More than six decades after the Cuban revolution, a silent shift in the regime's national interest began to take hold on the island.¹² The result was that the most vital national strategic interest for the aging Castro brothers became just two-fold: to remain in power, and to control the people.¹³ The fear of another U.S.-supported invasion no longer consumed the regime. This new domestic focus, coupled with the virtual collapse of Latin America's radical left at the end of the 20th Century, clearly limited Cuba's capacity for internationalism.¹⁴

U.S. Security Policy toward Cuba

The historical diplomatic rapprochement with Cuba as announced in 2014 fundamentally changed the imperative governing the formulation of security policy toward the island. President Obama's administration provided clear recommendations for the national security dimensions of his 2014 policy changes, and assigned the Department of State as the lead government agency for formulating, coordinating, and implementing the new policy.¹⁵ As currently formulated U.S. goals include near and long terms objectives.

In the near term, U.S. normalization of its relations with Cuba seeks to support broad-based economic growth, stability, increased people-to-people ties, and respect for human rights and democratic values in the region.¹⁶ Currently, there is almost no involvement from the U.S. military. Nonetheless, the strategic environment is a complex and evolving system that will bring a set of challenges and opportunities to the relationship; it is reasonable to expect that the Department of Defense may be called upon to play an active role as part of U.S. relations with Cuba in the future. Nonetheless, how the U.S.-Cuba relationship will specifically play out, and the associated opportunities and imperatives for DoD, are difficult to anticipate.

The long-term goals of U.S. policy toward Cuba are to enhance the security of the United States and its citizens at home and abroad, to support a prosperous and stable Cuba that offers economic opportunities to its people, to encourage increased respect for individual rights in Cuba, and to work for integration of Cuba into international and regional systems.¹⁷

Existing legislation describes and provides authority for future engagement between the Department of Defense and Cuban military forces. The Libertad Act includes two sections that deal with the Cuban military: Section 201 states that the United States will “assist a transition government in Cuba and a democratically elected government in Cuba to prepare the Cuban military forces for an appropriate role in a democracy.”¹⁸ Section 202 states that the United States will ensure that Military Adjustment Assistance is provided “to a transition government in Cuba and to a democratically elected government in Cuba ... [and] shall also include assistance in preparing the Cuban military forces to adjust to an appropriate role in a democracy.”¹⁹

This legislation established the parameter for future military-to-military engagements as a way to achieve and leverage a future governmental transition on the island.

In January 2016, General John F. Kelly, former commander of United States Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM), stated, “We’ve normalized relations now and, regardless of how we think of each other in terms of political ideologies, we have very common challenges and issues of mutual concern.”²⁰ Current policy restricts the Department of Defense from conducting any engagement without Department of State approval. To date, only two minor military activities had been conducted in support of the current policy: a small Cuban delegation participated in the annual Caribbean regional security conference sponsored by USSOUTHCOM; and another small contingent from Cuba visited the Joint Interagency Task Force South (JIATF-S), a multinational, multiservice, multiagency counter-narcotics task force based at the naval air station in Key West, Florida.²¹

Despite the lack of official U.S.–Cuba military engagement, there is an enduring history of low profile but effective bilateral military cooperation between Cuban Armed Forces and the U.S. military, predominately on issues related to counter-narcotics. As U.S.–Cuba relations continue to develop, military engagement is key because the Cuban military plays such a fundamental role in the day-to-day management and political decisions in the country.²² Fundamentally, U.S.–Cuban history has been defined by military-military engagements.

Scenario-Based Analysis Methodology

Although the U.S.–Cuba relationship can be characterized as a complex adaptive system filled with uncertainty and ambiguity, scenario-based forecasting is an effective method to help us better understand the strategic environment and to identify

challenges and opportunities facing the U.S. military. It also allows us to identify actors and trends that can directly or indirectly influence the strategic environment, leading to the formulation of policies and strategies that will directly or indirectly impact the military relations between the two countries in the future.

In order to support analysis of how the U.S. military can best prepare to support U.S. engagement with Cuba under the range of ways in which that relationship may play out in the future, this essay advances three representative scenarios: a permissive environment, a semi-permissive environment, and a non-permissive environment. It then advances reasonable options for the military component of engagement in each case. The U.S. Army War College Analytical Cultural Framework for Strategy and Policy and the U.S. Army War College Strategy Formulation Framework are used as a basis for formulating reasonable military options for engagement in each case.

Framework for Strategy and Policy

The U.S. Army War College Analytical Cultural Framework for Strategy and Policy offers a unique methodological process that uses culture as the key foundation for policy and strategy.²³ According to Lawrence Harrison, in his book *Underdevelopment Is a State of Mind: The Latin American Case*, in most Latin American countries, culture is a key factor in the decision-making process.²⁴ In the case of Cuba, an analysis of culture focuses attention on the centralized, personalistic nature of decision making on the island, and the dominant roles of the military and the Cuban Communist Party. It thus suggests the importance of working with the Cuban military as part of U.S.-Cuban engagement, and the potential role of the U.S. military in doing so.

The Cuban leadership perceives itself as a key regional player that can, if it so desires, assist the United States on issues related to illegal immigration, drug trafficking,

terrorism, and regional order.²⁵ The Cuban government is structured in a way that all power and decisions are centralized to a small group of senior-ranking officials personally chosen by Raúl Castro. Although the Cuban leadership signaled openness to reform, any threat to the “revolution” will translate as disrespect to the national sovereignty, which will stall any bilateral agreement. Similarly, consideration of Cuban nationalism will play an important role in the development of a feasible strategy toward the island. The use of nationalism has been the key to the regime’s survival in the past, and any threat to undermine it will be considered by the regime as a threat to its center of gravity.

In its national security strategy toward Cuba, the United States seeks to support the established institutions and processes dedicated to preserving stability, respecting Cuban sovereignty. At the same time, it seeks to further respect for and adherence to human rights and democracy by strengthening civil society and empower entrepreneurship.²⁶ Overall, thus, the United States and Cuba share common core objectives that allow their respective national security entities to engage and cooperate.

U.S. Army War College Strategy Formulation Framework

In developing the military component of strategies appropriate for each of the three scenarios identified in this paper, the U.S. Army War College Strategy Formulation Framework provides a frame of reference, focusing attention on global and domestic forces and trends that can positively or negatively influence implementation and associated risk.²⁷ The framework explains how domestic and international actors influence the policy decision-making process. Understanding those influences is important to both anticipating scenario outcomes and deriving appropriate responses. In the case of U.S. policy formulation toward Cuba, Congress, Cuban-American lobbyists,

and public opinion are the three major actors that could directly influence the strategic environment and level of engagement between the two nations, therefore influencing the future strategic political-military environment. Congress cites two main grievances with Cuba and the Castro brothers: the country's poor record on human rights, and compensation from expropriated properties to U.S. citizens from the time of the revolution.²⁸

For example, one organization that will continue to lobby to restrict U.S. engagement with Cuba under communist rule is the Cuban American National Foundation. It is one of the most successful lobbyist organizations vehemently opposing any change in American policy toward Cuba.²⁹ From 2003 to 2006, the group donated \$760,600 to congressional candidates, which explains the power this group holds in influencing policymakers.³⁰

Despite the efforts of such groups, it is also important to consider that nearly six in ten Americans support normalizing relations with Cuba, and most favor ending the trade embargo.³¹ Further, 62 percent of Americans said reopening ties with Cuba would be "mostly good" for the United States.³² As stated previously, the percentage of Cuban-Americans in favor of normalizing relations with Cuba is in line with Americans as a whole. The current legal embargo with Cuba will also impede engagements. The lifting of the embargo will continue to be difficult due to the continued resistance of interest group lobbying influencing the U.S. Congress. However, the embargo does not limit security engagement on issues of mutual interest.

Defining the Possible Strategy Environments

While, as noted previously, there are a range of possibilities for how the U.S.–Cuba relationship may develop, this section advances three representative scenarios

for the strategic environment, in order to develop appropriate strategies for military engagement under a representative range of circumstances. The three representative environments employed in this section—permissive, semi-permissive, and non-permissive—assist in identifying opportunities and challenges while also providing strategic options for the use of the military instrument of national power in support of national policy objectives.

POSSIBLE STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTS		
	USA	CUBA
Permissive	+	+
Semi Permissive	+	-
	-	+
Non Permissive	-	-

Figure 1. Strategic Pol-Mil Environments

Permissive Strategic Pol-Mil Environment

In the postulated permissive environment scenario, both governments are open to engaging with each other on issues of mutual concern. The alignment of interests and sense of urgency to cooperate and engage beyond traditional models are top priority.

Such a scenario could arise from significant political change in Cuba following that nation’s 2018 Congress and national elections leading to a new generation of

leadership more disposed to cooperate with the United States. On the U.S. side, decisive factors could be the changing nature of the Cuban diaspora, and new personnel within the Trump's administration, or its successor, satisfied with the transition from Castro leadership and disposed to pursue the business opportunities arising from change in Cuba.

As explained previously, the Cuban Military Armed Forces is the central institution of the state in Cuba, and arguably the most capable and prestigious establishment of the regime.³³ The Cuban military continues to be a complex and powerful institution that enjoys great public respect and remains central to the functioning of the Cuban economy and state.³⁴ Yet, Fuerzas Armada Revolucionarias' equipment is obsolete, broadening the possibility of establishing military-to-military cooperation in the future.³⁵ If the scenario environment permits and the U.S. military is granted the authority and resources needed, bilateral engagement between the two Armed Forces could play an important role in an expanding engagement between the two countries in general. Given the critical role of Cuba's Armed Forces in the Cuban government, strengthening the core of this institution and the importance of subordination to civil elected leadership should become top priorities of the leaders. Trust would likely continue to be a challenge, but in this scenario the will and desire for mutual cooperation would provide the venue for the partnership based on a respect to grow and expand. To build this trust, it would be important for it to have clearly delineated strategic objectives, mutually understood by both nations' leaders, to synchronize efforts and reduce confusion between the militaries and other key actors, including the interagency and partner nation community.

Under this scenario, the principal U.S. imperative and challenge from a military–political perspective would be to build a strategy that best addresses the core needs of the Cuban military, in the context of years of very little institutional interaction with the U.S. military, a history of mistrust and separate development, and a prolonged lack of resources on the Cuban side. In order to advance cooperation between the two defense institutions, U.S. military leadership should engage in programs and activities suitable and feasible to the Cuban military; moving too quickly could saturate the capacity and capabilities of the host nation. Although the environment may be suitable for cooperation, starting slow and demonstrating an interest in understanding each other would help build trust and professional respect. Most militaries tend to teach what they know and have a difficult time adapting their approaches to foreign circumstances.³⁶ Planners must not succumb to the tendency of developing programs for host nations modeled on U.S. institutions. Current U.S.–Argentina relations are undergoing a ramp-up in activities due to the change on the political environment, from non-permissive to permissive; this situation could provide invaluable lessons learned and strategic ideas.

The vision of operating under this scenario is to assist Cuba’s defense and political re-integration into the region, leveraging Cuba’s interest in such participation to advance broader regional objectives such as countering transnational criminal organizations and cooperating with humanitarian assistance and disaster relief efforts in the hemisphere. Due to resource allocation constraints, USSOUTHCOM’s commander would need to find ways to foster wide-reaching solutions by leveraging and integrating other U.S. agencies and private-sector and public-private organizations into the shared mission of ensuring security and enhancing stability, like DoS-Bureau of International

Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL), Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), just to name a few.

The U.S. military in coordination with the interagency community should consider developing approaches to enhance the capabilities and capacity of the Cuban military sector by focusing on: defense institution building, countering transnational organized crime, providing humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR), and engaging in peace-keeping operations. Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief is an area of collaboration that could produce intriguing results. These programs help improve the abilities of partner nations to provide essential services to their citizens, reduce human suffering, and support economic development.³⁷ During the international response to the Haiti earthquake in 2010, for example, formal contact between U.S. and Cuban militaries was permitted and encouraged by both administrations. Cuba's vast experience in dealing with natural disasters and medical emergencies, in addition to its ability to work with other nations in the region, facilitated by its geopolitical location, make it an obvious site for a regional HA/DR medical trauma center of excellence, where other Caribbean countries could train and build interoperability in preparation for future medical disaster relief response. Collaborative relief efforts could save U.S. government resources and allow for a more rapid, coordinated response to a disaster in the region that could save thousands of lives.

In addition, the United States could engage with Cuba in defense institution building efforts: the U.S. could work to align the capabilities and resources of the Cuban defense element with its overall mission. This initiative would aim to facilitate dialogue

between the civilians elected to authority and military leadership; it further would show the U.S. commitment to becoming the future partner of choice. Defense institution building leads to close and fruitful cooperation aimed at resolving medium and long-term interests, which in turn could lead to institutional reform. The main objective of such engagement would be to link policy (objectives), strategy (resources), and programs (ways of doing business) to maximize efficiency and measurement based on the host nation's capacity and capabilities. Also, defense institutional building activities could provide mechanisms that assist the partner nation in developing and managing capable security forces subject to appropriate civilian control. This engagement would be managed and authorized by the Under Secretary of Defense in direct coordination with the combatant commander by integrating several security cooperation and assistance programs in support of the initiative.

In the permissive scenario, the countries have presumably agreed on the need to end terrorism and oppose those who promote it; they disagreed, however, on how to accomplish this. While Cuba focused on the root cause, the United States argued for immediate military and diplomatic efforts directed against the perpetrators and those supporting the crimes.³⁸ Developing programs to enhance Cuba's capabilities to counter such criminal networks is important to the U.S. government, as these threats exploit the power vacuum generated by the complexity of the environment and the danger in implementing the U.S. southern approach due to geographic proximity. However, given Cuban Armed Forces' sense of pride in their institution and history, such an approach should begin from a framework of respect for Cuban capabilities, and an attempt to leverage and improve them, wherever possible, in support of shared regional objectives.

The United States could also work together with Cuba in international peacekeeping operations. One good example is Africa, where El Salvador, Chile, and Peru are already deployed and expect to remain for the next three to five years. Starting small, by deploying Cuban forces along with those of one country already in position, would facilitate development and integration. In general, peacekeeping operations help to maintain stability in war-torn countries and troubled regions, protect civilians, and deliver critical humanitarian aid.³⁹ For Cuba, this type of engagement could assist in the strategic transition to civilian authority by maintaining the thousands of military service members fully engaged, which is in the best interest of the new administration due to strong institutional roots. More appealing to Cuba's leadership, though, might be that these types of missions come with a monetary incentive for the nation.

Semi-Permissive Strategic Pol-Mil Environment

In the semi-permissive environment scenario, one country is willing to assist and cooperate, but the other is more cautious about doing so, albeit still willing to cooperate under select circumstances. There are, by definition, two variants of the semi-permissive environment: a willing Cuba with a reluctant U.S., and a willing U.S. with a reluctant Cuba. The first scenario could arise from 2018 parliamentary elections in Cuba that produce significant reforms, while the U.S. Congress and Administration maintains a hardline posture, albeit with some willingness to acknowledge reform in Cuba. The second scenario could arise from a change in Congress in the U.S. or a desire by the Trump administration to be more accommodating of Cuba, despite the retention of power by hardliners in Cuba after the 2018 Congress.

Focusing on politically non-sensitive assistance such as military medical cooperation and collaborating in the fight against transnational organized crime

networks is a useful way of building confidence when there is persistent mistrust and reluctance to cooperate by one side. Finding innovative ways to cooperate without damaging an already sensitive political-military relationship would require close synchronization between the U.S. military and the joint interagency intergovernmental and multinational community.

In the semi-permissive scenario, as in the permissive scenario, HA/DR cooperation could be an important part of U.S. military engagement with Cuba. By contrast to the permissive scenario, such cooperation in the semi-permissive environment would not be focused on creating a region-wide multilateral capability, but rather, cooperating, planning collaboratively, and sharing resources where possible to support effective responses to disasters in the region while simultaneously expanding engagement and building confidence between the militaries of each nation.

Another important tool for the U.S. military in a semi-permissive environment is engagement through professional military education (PME) institutions and training. To this end, the U.S. military should consider, where appropriate, the sponsorship of Cuban officers to select courses at the Western Hemisphere Institute for National Security (WHINSEC), such as those on human rights, the U.S. Army War College, professional military conferences such as those sponsored by USSOUTHCOM and other partner nation schools, and events as a means of confidence building in a non-operational context.

To navigate the sensitivities within the semi-permissive environment, the U.S. should give particular attention to leveraging military-to-military engagement with regional partners, such as El Salvador and Colombia, who already enjoy a working level

of trust with the Cuban military. Enhancing the scope of the U.S.–Colombian action plan to train and exchange with the Cuban military in the medical domain, and in collaborating in the fight against transnational organized crime networks, might be another venue of interest to pursue. Politically, trilateral engagements can be easier to sell to national leadership and public opinion than a series of bilateral agreements.⁴⁰ Within this scenario, presenting a U.S. unity effort and leveraging partner resources in the region in the medical field could provide strategic engagements that are appealing and of mutual interest.

If Cuba's administration were not open to expanding military engagements, the U.S. military, if policy permitted, should then fall back to supporting historical inoffensive efforts of cooperation where both national interest and political determination have aligned. Efforts like firefighter training at the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base and supporting repatriation operations are examples of low-profile events that lead to connectivity, especially due to geographic and U.S. political interests of maintaining the U.S. Navy Base in Guantanamo, Cuba.⁴¹ Maintaining such engagement in the semi-permissive environment will be important to counter likely efforts by Russia and China to woo Cuba to prevent further U.S. inroads.

However, which of the two countries would be more open to engage would continue to be the main question as there are so many different domestic and international trends that affect the outcome of a comprehensive national policy on this bilateral relationship. Due to the uncertainty of the political strategic environment between both countries, it is imperative to develop strategic options for the geographic commander to support national security recommendations and policies toward Cuba. If

the opportunity to enhance this partnership is available, allowing Cuba to dictate the pace and amount of engagement may be the most effective way to build trust and respect, based on the vast differences in capacity and capabilities between the two militaries.

Non-Permissive Strategic Pol-Mil Environment

In the non-permissive environment scenario, neither country is open to engagement and cooperation between their militaries. This scenario could arise from continued grievances from both sides if the U.S. administration maintains a hardline posture against Cuba following the 2018 parliamentary election. It could occur that Cuba's new administration continues to support hardline Marxist revolutionary principles, both at home and abroad. In such a case, due to a lack of political will from both sides, significant military-to-military cooperation would not be realistic. Even a clear policy permitting military-to-military contact by either or both countries would not provide benefits if there was not an underlying basis for goodwill and trust and the desire to improve the relationship. Despite such limitations, there may be an opportunity to achieve some engagement within the non-permissive scenario, while benefitting U.S. relations with other countries in the region, by inviting Cuba to attend one of the annual U.S.-sponsored military regional conferences hosted in either Central America or the Caribbean. Doing so would be send a strategic message to the region, showing U.S. commitment to open dialogue and regional cooperation despite its differences with Cuba.

On the other hand, within the non-permissive scenario, the U.S. should anticipate continued Cuban efforts to undermine the U.S. position and policy goals in the region, to include promoting anti-U.S. regimes and movement, and even working with criminal

groups and illicit networks. Under such scenarios, the appropriate role of U.S. military engagement would shift from one of seeking engagement with Cuba, to working with affected nations in the region to block or mitigate the consequences of such efforts.

Beyond such traditional “troublemaking” in the region, Cuba’s leaders might further be open to cooperating with other actors like Russian and Chinese militaries, which could use the strategic location of Cuba to undermine the strategic position of the U.S. in the region. This includes the possibility of Russia reaching an agreement with Cuban leadership for expanded port access and logistical support. Such actions might also include Russian or Chinese intelligence/signals intelligence, or cyber and space cooperation engagements.

Particularly in the case of Cuban collaboration with extra-hemispheric actors in a fashion that threatens U.S. interests, the United States should consider developing a comprehensive strategy to deter Cuba’s efforts, possibly in conjunction with outside actors to undermine U.S. interests in the region, and to respond to such initiatives were they to occur. Given the right authority, the U.S. military should engage proactively and deepen security cooperation with its partners in the region, especially the Caribbean countries of the Dominican Republic and Jamaica. Further, in coordination with key interagency, intergovernmental, and partners in the region, the U.S. should consider developing a comprehensive deterrence strategy utilizing all instruments of national power to protect the homeland and its interest. Strategically, by deploying land and naval forces to conduct security cooperation and assistance activities with other partner countries in the Caribbean, the U.S. would demonstrate a unified effort to deter any

possible threats to the United States and its commitment to remain the partner of choice in the region.

Conclusion

Every indicator shows that the relationship between the United States and Cuba will continue to be complex and sensitive. President Obama and Raúl Castro's unexpected announcement in 2014 of the normalization of relations between the two countries was the first indicator that the status quo is obsolete. However, President Donald Trump has not yet given a clear indication regarding how the United States will proceed with respect to the U.S.–Cuba relationship, aside from his expressed intention to revisit the status quo. The mixed signals about how the current administration will continue or change the current policy toward Cuba further complicate the strategic landscape.

As noted previously, anticipating how the domestic political dynamics in the U.S. and Cuba, and the interactions between them will play out, is difficult. However consideration of the three U.S.–Cuba scenarios examined in this work (permissive, semi-permissive, and non-permissive) contribute to the formulation of effective U.S. policy toward Cuba and the region by helping military and other decision-makers prepare for a range of options that may reasonably occur, and the appropriate responses. Cuba, only 90 miles from the U.S. coast, is connected to the U.S. in historical, political, and human terms. It is imperative for the effective management of U.S. hemispheric security efforts to be prepared for whatever course U.S.–Cuba relations take.

Endnotes

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