

Retired military officers call upon Trump Administration to normalize relations with Cuba.

By Tom Whitney

A report April 20 from the Miami Herald indicates that, “Sixteen retired senior military officers are asking the Trump administration to continue the process of normalization with Cuba for the sake of U.S. national security and stability in the region.”

Six of the 16 letter-signers traveled to Havana from March 14-17 at the invitation of the Cuban government and met with officials from the Foreign Ministry as well as representatives from the Energy, Agriculture, Trade, and Foreign Investment ministries. The group also visited the Port of Mariel and met with 12 Ministry of Interior officials.

The non-partisan American Security Project coordinated the trip and arranged for the letter. Retired Marine Corps Brigadier General Stephen A. Cheney, executive director of that organization, was one of those signing it. The letter is aimed at influencing the Trump administration while its review of Cuba policies is underway.

According to Cheney, the Trump administration “must take into account all national security factors under consideration” and not look at the current policy “simply as something that Obama did and because Obama did it, you hate it.” Cheney praised Cuban cooperation on issues like anti-drug efforts but added that bi-lateral meetings aren’t taking place because the Trump administration has yet to replace officials from the Obama era.

Here is the letter:

April 20, 2017

Lieutenant General H.R. McMaster
National Security Advisor to the President
The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave.
Washington DC, 20050

Dear General McMaster:

In the heated debates about engagement and normalization of relations with Cuba, the opportunities it presents to strengthen US national security are often overlooked. As retired flag officers from across the armed forces, we have spent our lives securing America's national security in every corner of the world. We have seen first-hand over many decades the policies and initiatives that worked and those that have not. The continued normalization of relations with Cuba is important to the national security of the United States and to the stability of relationships in the Western Hemisphere.

Cuba's location in the Caribbean and proximity to the US make it a natural and strategically valuable partner on issues of immediate concern, including terrorism, border control, drug interdiction, environmental protections, and emergency preparedness. Indeed, substantial progress already has been made over the last two years in these and other areas, resulting in 22 agreements between the US and Cuba and practical coordination with our military and other agencies. We should continue and expand those efforts. Ensuring Cuba's economic stability will further U.S security interests in the western hemisphere, particularly given the challenges facing certain of our neighbors in Latin America. By increasing trade and information flow, we will empower the Cuban people to better determine their own futures. We acknowledge the current regime must do more to open its political system and dialogue with the Cuban people. But, if we fail to engage economically and politically, it is certain that China, Russia, and other entities whose interests are contrary to the United States' will rush into the vacuum. We have an opportunity now to shape and fill a strategic void.

Completing the reopening of diplomatic relations with Cuba will provide long-term national security benefits to the United States. It will finally secure our "Third Border." It will reshape our relations throughout Latin America, isolating our adversaries. As a matter of national security, we urge our elected leaders to continue the process of normalization with Cuba and not to let the momentum fade.

Respectfully,

General James T. Hill USA, (Ret.)

Admiral Robert Inman, USN (Ret.)

General Merrill "Tony" McPeak, USAF (Ret.)

Lieutenant General John G. Castellaw, USMC (Ret.)

Lieutenant General Daniel Christman, USA (Ret.)
Vice Admiral Lee Gunn, USN (Ret.)
Lieutenant General Dirk Jameson, USAF (Ret.)
Lieutenant General Donald Kerrick, USA (Ret.)
Lieutenant General Norman R. Seip, USAF (Ret.)
Major General Paul Eaton, USA (Ret.)
Major General Alan B. Salisbury, USA (Ret.)
Rear Admiral Jamie Barnett, USNR (Ret.)
Brigadier General Stephen A. Cheney, USMC (Ret.)
Brigadier General David McGinnis USA (Ret.)
Rear Admiral Michael Smith USN (Ret.)
Brigadier General Stephen Xenakis, USA (Ret.)

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