

Obama to take Cuba off state terror list

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President Barack Obama has announced his widely anticipated decision to end the 33-year designation of Cuba as a “state sponsor of terrorism.” The action removes a key obstacle to the normalization of ties between Washington and Havana that both he and his Cuban counterpart, Raul Castro, initiated in speeches delivered simultaneously last December 17. It also helps clear the way for the penetration of Cuba’s economy by US finance capital.

The decision, coming on the heels of the meeting between the two heads of state at the Summit of the Americas in Panama, was made public through Obama’s message to the US Congress on Tuesday that he intends to remove Cuba from Washington’s list of alleged terrorist nations, which also includes Iran, Syria and Sudan.

The notification initiates a 45-day period for Congress to consider the action, but it can be halted through the passage of new legislation overriding the president’s decision.

Right-wing Republicans, including those tied to the Cuban exile groups in Miami, expressed their hostility to removing Cuba from the list. Florida Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, for example, railed against the action as “a miscarriage of justice borne out of political motivations not rooted in reality.”

However, with the US Chamber of Commerce and other representatives of the major US-based corporations and financial institutions pushing strongly for normalization, it appears unlikely that Congress will reverse Obama’s decision.

“Circumstances have changed since 1982, when Cuba was originally designated as a state sponsor of terrorism because of its efforts to promote armed revolution by forces in Latin America,” Secretary of State John Kerry said in a statement defending the decision. “Our hemisphere, and the world, look very different today than they did 33 years ago.”

However much things have changed, the US branding of Cuba as a “state sponsor of terrorism” was always a grotesque inversion of the real relationship between the two countries.

Cuba was placed on the list for its support for the Sandinista-led revolution that toppled the US-backed dictatorship in Nicaragua and for the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN), which carried out an armed revolt against the US-backed juntas that ruled El Salvador.

At the time, the Reagan administration and the CIA were funding and directing an illegal terrorist campaign by the so-called contras against Nicaragua, while providing arms, aid and advisors to the Salvadoran military and death squads, which terrorized the entire population, killing some 75,000 people.

Since then, both the Sandinistas and the FLMN have headed bourgeois governments in Nicaragua and El Salvador with which Washington maintains full diplomatic relations.

In more recent years, the State Department justified the “terrorist” slander against Cuba on the country’s providing sanctuary to members of both the Basque separatist group ETA and the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia). Spain, which is negotiating over the ETA members, opposes US sanctions, while Colombia and the FARC are currently engaged in peace talks brokered by Havana.

As early as 1998, the US intelligence agencies conducted a comprehensive review which concluded that Cuba represented no threat to US national security, thereby exposing the fraudulent character of its designation as a sponsor of terrorism.

Cuba’s Foreign Ministry welcomed Obama’s decision “to remove Cuba from a list on which it never deserved to belong” as “just.” The statement, issued by Josefina Vidal, the ministry’s director of US relations, pointed out that Cuba has “been the victim of hundreds

of acts of terrorism that have cost 3,478 lives and incapacitated 2,099 Cuban citizens.”

The source of the vast majority of these attacks has been the United States, whose government has harbored and protected such infamous terrorists as Orlando Bosch and Luis Posada Carriles, who were responsible for the 1976 terrorist bombing of a Cuban airliner in which all 73 people on board were killed.

The immediate effect of taking Cuba off the phony terrorist black list is that it will allow a future Cuban embassy in Washington to maintain a bank account in the US to fund its operations. The present Cuban diplomatic mission to the United Nations in New York and the country’s interests section in Washington are forced to operate on a strictly cash basis because no American bank will deal with them.

The potential penalties for financial institutions providing services to Cuba are daunting. Just last June, the Paris-based BNP Paribas S.A. (BNPP), the fourth largest bank in the world, was forced to pay a nearly \$9 billion penalty to settle US charges that it had “placed its financial network at the services of rogue nations” and acted in “criminal support of countries and entities engaged in acts of terrorism and other atrocities,” by dealing with Sudan, Iran, and Cuba.

Similarly, in 2012 Holland’s ING Bank was fined \$619 million dollars for financial and commercial transactions with Cuba, and HSBC was fined \$375 million for alleged violations of sanctions against Cuba and other countries.

US agribusiness is particularly interested in having the financial sanctions lifted, as it is currently unable to utilize credit arrangements to sell goods to Cuba.

The removal of Cuba from the terrorist list, however, still leaves in place the economic blockade that has been in effect for the last 55 years. The *Washington Post* cited US officials as saying that “full normalization of relations with Cuba, which would include congressional removal of sanctions against Havana, could take years.”

Nonetheless, the drive by US capitalism to enter the Cuban market and, more generally, compete with China and Europe for its dwindling share of the Latin American market places significant pressure on Congress to lift the embargo.

As for the Castro regime, it is banking on US financial investment propping up the Cuban economy

and hoping to save its own power and privileges by shaping the policies of the Cuban state—and its relations with foreign capital—along the lines of those currently pursued by the regime in China. Such a course, however, inevitably spells a sharpening of the class struggle within Cuba.



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