

Thesis Change in U.S. Foreign Policy towards Cuba

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Change in U.S. Foreign Policy towards Cuba

Obama's Rejection of the Past

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Abstract

Foreign policy change is often explained as being a result of a crisis or a failure of the existing policy. This thesis examines the origins of the U.S. foreign policy change towards Cuba in December 2014. Three sources of change are being tested, the influence of the Cuban American interest group, the influence of the leadership transition in Cuba, and the influence of the individual beliefs and preferences of Barack Obama. This thesis assesses the three different sources of change as competing explanations using congruence method. I argue that the change in preferences of the Cuban Americans to wanting a more moderate approach towards the island and the personal preference of Obama to engage with Cuba have led to the policy redirection. This research demonstrates that a crisis situation is not necessary and that failure of a policy is not sufficient to change foreign policy.

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Introduction

On 17 December 2014, the ¹⁶ United States and Cuba announced that they would restore diplomatic relations. This came after more than half a century of antagonism (Leogrande 2015: 473). After Fidel Castro came into power in 1959, he developed ties with the Soviet Union, and nationalised U.S.-owned properties (Renwick and Lee 2015). ⁶² The relationship between the United States and Cuba has been difficult since 1961, when the U.S. severed diplomatic ties and initiated covert missions to remove Fidel Castro from power (Renwick and Lee 2015). ²⁰ After the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, the U.S. made an agreement with Cuba and the Soviet Union not to overthrow the regime in Cuba. The tensions and the strained relationship ¹³ between the two countries continued after the end of the Cold War. In 1992, the U.S. even strengthened its embargo on the island, stating that it would not lift this policy until Cuba holds free and fair elections that excluded the Castro family (Renwick and Lee 2015).

Although the sanctions against Cuba had long been criticised by internal analysts (Gordon 2012: 63) and the international community, which condemned the embargo in the general assembly of the U.N. (Betancourt 2006: 66), it was only in December 2014 that ²⁴ President Barack Obama announced that the U.S. would restore its diplomatic ties with Cuba. The announcement could be regarded as mainly a symbolic move since most economic sanctions have remained (Leogrande 2015: 486). Nevertheless, it is a substantial shift with regards to the past 50 years and might mark the beginning of greater bilateral cooperation.

What is puzzling about the sudden policy change of the United States is mainly the timing of the adjustment. In general, policy change is often discussed when related

to external shocks and systemic changes both at the international and domestic levels. Usually, continuity is preferred over change since a state simply cannot constantly assess and readjust its policy to optimize results. A compelling reason is needed to change foreign policy drastically (Welch 2005: 7). Following this logic, a change would have been expected for example when the international system changed ²⁰ with the collapse of the Soviet Union, especially since Moscow was Cuba's most important security partner. However, this did not happen. With this research project I want to assess what contributed to the policy change towards Cuba. Several factors need to be taken into account, namely the domestic changes in Cuba since Fidel Castro passed on his presidency to his brother Raul, domestic factors in the U.S. such as the influence of Cuban Americans on policy making, and the individual preferences of President Barack Obama. The research question of this thesis is therefore: What explains the sudden policy change of the United States towards Cuba in December 2014?

This thesis will proceed as follows: first, I discuss the existing literatures that try to explain state behaviour and foreign policy redirections. Traditional IR theories like (neo)realism and constructivism cannot provide a convincing answer to the research question. Subsequently, the theoretical section presents the theories I use in this paper in order to give an explanation to the sudden policy change. I argue that a consideration of multiple factors coming from the foreign policy change literature and a specific focus on the individual preferences of Obama provides a persuasive answer. The fourth section is the research design which describes the case selection, methods, operationalization, and the data used for this research. The fifth section discusses the empirical analysis and is divided in three sub-sections according to the hypotheses. I finish with the conclusion of the findings and a discussion of new avenues of research.

Literature Review

Since this research project is focused on explaining the change in foreign policy of the United States towards Cuba, it is essential to provide an overview of what has been written in the scholarly realm about factors influencing and leading to foreign policy change. What are the motivations to support or implement a certain policy and what causes governments to revise long standing policies? There are various levels of analysis that can be used to explain the behaviour of states. The traditional International Relations (IR) theories primarily focus on the systemic level and treat states as unitary rational actors (Hudson 2007). Two of the most important schools of thought focusing on this level are (neo)realism and constructivism. As a reaction to these traditional approaches of international politics, Foreign Policy Analysis is mainly interested in the human beings making the specific decisions regarding foreign policy.

I argue that the U.S. policy towards Cuba and the change in 2014 cannot be explained by traditional IR theories. Realism discusses international politics at the systemic level, attributing causes of change to modifications in threats to the balance of power or to overall systemic shifts (Kaarbo 2015, Hudson 2007). Both of these factors were not present in the period leading to the policy change of 2014. Shifting from material reasons to ideational reasons, constructivism argues that constructed ideas of identity, preferences, and interests influence how states behave (Hudson 2007). However, since there have not been major ideational shifts in neither Cuba nor the United States and since constructivism still lacks an emphasis on agency, it fails to effectively explain the decision to restore diplomatic ties with Cuba.

Liberalism is a third traditional IR theory which focuses on state-society relations where domestic preferences influence state behaviour (Moravcsik 1997: 513).

This approach seems better suited to answer the research question posed in this thesis since it moves beyond merely the systemic level of analysis and includes domestic factors as well. However, the potential role Barack Obama played as an individual in the policy change would be discarded or analysed as subject to social pressures since liberalism argues that individuals respond to domestic pressures rather than take into account individually held preferences (Pohl 2013: 317). Furthermore, although liberalism takes interaction with other states into account, it is being discussed as if this interaction does not influence the content of the preferences (Pohl 2013: 316).

Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) as a discipline goes a step further. It goes beyond the systemic level of analysis and takes domestic features into account. Moreover, it does so by looking at the decision making process in which human beings act individually or in groups (Hudson 2007: 4). Many different factors on a range of different levels influence decision makers and therefore the analysis in FPA is multifactorial and multilevel (Hudson 2007: 7). More than the liberal school of thought, FPA is agent oriented and actor specific. Within FPA there is a literature which specifically focuses on foreign policy change which this thesis will build on.

Several scholars have focused on foreign policy change (Hermann 1990, Gustavsson 1999, Welch 2005, Blavoukos and Bourantonis 2014). The main debate within the field of foreign policy change is about which factors to include in a model that explains change and what change entails. Certain authors only look at major changes that influence the full scale of a state's external relations (Gustavsson 1999: 76). The policy change considered in this thesis is not of this nature. The focus is merely on the policy towards one country and using Hermann's categorization could be labelled as 'problem/goal change'. Hermann defines foreign policy as a program which

is goal or problem-oriented and directed at a foreign entity (1990: 5). Change in foreign policy can occur in four gradual stages from adjustment changes, program changes, problem/goal changes, to international orientation changes. Problem/goal change entails a change in the problem or goal the state is addressing through a certain policy (Hermann 1990: 5).

Multiple authors argue that the bureaucratic structure of a country influences potential policy change (Hermann 1990, Welch 2005, Blavoukos and Bourantonis 2014). A decision maker in a state that is democratic and highly bureaucratic has to overcome more political and institutional obstacles in order to change a policy (Blavoukos and Bourantonis 2014: 486). Political opposition might hinder policy change, as well as the structure of governmental organisations since these often operate to maintain the policy that is established (Hermann 1990: 8). Welch argues that organisational constraints can help to explain inaction and stability of policies (2005: 31). Governments are complex organisations and policy is formed in an institutional setting that influence the options perceived by the decision makers (Welch 2005: 31). Changing how governmental institutions operate is possible. However, institutional reform is costly and therefore poses a constraint to foreign policy change. Regarding the U.S.-Cuba relations case, there have been no major changes in governmental institutions and how they operate. Although this might account for the endurance of the previous policy for over 5 decades, it cannot explain the change in December 2014.

Furthermore, the literature suggests that all foreign policy redirection is driven by failure. Policy makers that come to realise that a certain policy is not serving its interests in the best possible way may become advocates of change when they believe that the failure of the current policy happened repeatedly or catastrophically (Welch

2005. 45-46) Although this is an aspect that might contribute to a potential redirection of foreign policy, ⁶¹ I argue that it is not a sufficient condition since it was known for years that the policy towards Cuba did not have the desired effect of a regime change on the island (Gordon 2012: 63).

In addition, an external shock is often regarded as a significant factor leading to adjusting foreign policy (Hermann 1990, Gustavsson 1999, Welch 2005). States are likely to pursue the policy of yesterday unless there is a great shock. The theory that an external shock leads to policy change might explain the longevity of the lack of diplomatic relations. However, it cannot account for the change in 2014 since there has not been an external shock in the years leading to the decision to restore diplomatic ties. External shocks are dramatic international events (Hermann 1990: 12). An example of an external shock is the ² collapse of the Soviet Union. However this event did not cause the U.S. to redirect its policy, even though Cuba lost its most significant partner.

The existing literature comes up with many origins and explanations of change. Blavoukos and Bourantonis offer a model that clusters the parameters ¹⁹ according to their domestic or international origins (2014: 484). Their eclectic analytical typology comes ¹⁹ from both rational choice and cultural approaches. Instead of integrating different bodies of knowledge, they offer multiperspectivism to provide insights from different frameworks without necessarily integrating them (Ibid. 486). In my theoretical framework, I will elaborate on their attempt to make a comprehensive framework and include aspects of foreign policy literature focusing ²³ on the individual level of analysis as well since the role of Barack Obama appears to be of importance in answering the question of why the United States changed its policy towards Cuba in December 2014.

Theoretical Section

This thesis will mainly build on the theoretical framework of Blavoukos and Bourantonis (2014). Their framework incorporates elements of earlier work on foreign policy change that assess the sources of change as well as work that focuses on agents-processes, namely how certain individuals or groups of individuals can exert influence on the foreign policy making. However, I will not only test their framework but also include a new hypothesis which focuses on the individual level of analysis since I believe that the preferences of President Obama cannot be disregarded in this case. The proposed hypotheses might interplay. For example, the first three hypotheses could account for the permissive environment that made it possible for Obama to exert a key influence on the decision making process. However, the hypotheses will primarily be tested as competing ones. Since the policy change is fairly recent, this thesis will primarily contribute by specifying the origins of change in this particular case. Moreover, Blavoukos and Bourantonis do not provide a mechanism how these varying origins of change might interact.

The result of a decision making process is the foreign policy output. Foreign policy output here is defined ⁶⁰ as a set of goals and directives formulated by authoritative decision makers directed at an external entity and does not include unintended behaviour (Gustavsson 1999: 75). Changes in output can occur in three occasions according to Blavoukos and Bourantonis: firstly, there might be new inputs, defined as alternative options, from various levels into the ¹⁷ decision making process. Secondly, the structure of the decision making process might develop and allow existing inputs to gain influence. Thirdly, the central policy makers could experience a change in discourse, valuing new ideas and therefore changing the output without actually changing the input

and/or the structure (2014: 484). For the purpose of answering the research question of this paper, the second possibility can be disregarded since there has not been a significant change in the domestic political, institutional, or bureaucratic structure of the 59 decision making process in the United States. Therefore, the main focus will lie on potential new inputs which can come from both the domestic and international level and on the role of Obama as an influential individual in the decision making process.

Domestic advocacy groups that support a certain foreign policy course of action can influence the decision makers. In the United States, Cuban Americans¹ have traditionally been lobbying for an isolationist policy towards Cuba that is in favour of a 1 regime change on the island (Pérez 2014: 139). Cuban Americans have been 1 able to exert influence on U.S. policy making by lobbying Congress, State Department and the National Security Council (Pérez 2014: 150). According to Blavoukos and Bourantonis, the strength of these groups defines the influence on actual policy shaping (2014: 487).

The Cuban Americans are mainly concerned with foreign policy directed to their country of origin and try to influence foreign policy making (Rytz 2013: 1). Following Rytz's definition, influence here means the translation of one's 1 interests or preferences into foreign policy (2013: 7). Thus, when the Cuban Americans are able to exert a lot of power on the decision making process their influence will increase and the policies will reflect their interests. In this thesis, I want to assess whether the strength of the Cuban Americans has decreased or if their preferences have changed. Any variation on these

¹ The concept of the Cuban American interest group/advocacy group in this thesis differentiates from the concept as used by Rytz and Blavoukos and Bourantonis. I focus on the status and preferences of the Cuban American immigrant community as a whole since a focus only on the CANF or another Cuban American lobby group would give a distorted view of the influences exerted by the Cuban American community. I am considering the Cuban American community as an advocacy group at a higher level of abstraction.

dimensions might have contributed to the normalisation of diplomatic ties with Cuba.

The following hypotheses are derived from this logic:

H1: The decrease in strength of influence of the Cuban American interest group led to the policy change of the U.S. towards Cuba.

H2: The change in preferences of Cuban Americans regarding the U.S. foreign policy towards Cuba led to the policy change of the U.S. towards Cuba.

Building from the Blavoukos and Bourantonis framework, I also take into consideration the notion of international structural parameters. Interaction with the international system can be the source of foreign policy change. Policy formation can be affected through three mechanisms. First, the interaction with other states can have an influence of foreign policy. Second, aspiring to become a member of an international organisation can influence state behaviour. Third, participating in an international organisation can result in socialisation in this organisation and therefore in the adaption of a state's foreign policy (2014: 489). The last two mechanisms do not apply in this specific case. The international level of analysis can only have an effect on U.S. policy if we look at changes within Cuba. Since Fidel Castro resigned and his brother Raul Castro succeeded him, there have been certain political and economic developments. Blavoukos and Bourantonis argue that domestic changes in one country can create a crisis which highlights the inappropriateness of previous policies. Although such a crisis did not occur and the inappropriateness of the previous policy had been widely known, I still want to argue that developments in one country can influence policy change. These

developments might have created a window of opportunity for the negotiations that eventually led to the announcement in December 2014 that the countries would normalise diplomatic ties. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H3: The leadership change in Cuba, the power transition from Fidel Castro to Raul Castro, led to the policy change of the U.S. towards Cuba.

I want to complement Blavoukos and Bourantonis's framework by also focusing on the individual level of analysis. Blavoukos and Bourantonis consciously ignore the potential influence of the individual leader since they state that it cannot be theorized (2014: 484). However, I anticipate that the change in policy towards Cuba cannot be fully explained if you do not take the individual into account and therefore their model falls short in its explanatory power. The role of the leader has been discussed by several scholars, although the focus has primarily been on the influence of a leader's personal characteristics in times of interstate conflict and use of force (Gallagher and Allen 2014, Hermann et al. 2001, Dyson 2006). I want to argue that the characteristics of a leader in the decision making process can influence foreign policy making in other contexts as well. Therefore, I build on an article of Jervis who argues that who leads can matter in various ways (2013). For this thesis, I choose to focus on how the content of a policy can be affected by the personal beliefs and preferences of the President of the United States. Eleven presidents have been in power since the deterioration of relations with Cuba. Could it be possible that individual traits of Barack Obama can explain his decision to normalise diplomatic relations with the island? This leads to the fourth hypothesis:

H4: President Barack Obama's personal beliefs and preferences led to the change in U.S. policy towards Cuba.

The following section will discuss how the hypotheses are operationalized, define the concepts used, and explain what methods will be used to find an answer to the research question.

Research Design

Case Selection

This research project is outcome-centric and the case selection is therefore based on the dependent variable, which in this case is the normalisation of diplomatic relations with Cuba in December 2014. The decision of the United States to re-establish diplomatic ties with the island is the subject of a single case study. The fact that multiple approaches would suggest that the United States adjusted its policy towards the island at an earlier point, and that this shift only happened in December 2014 makes it a deviant case study. The decision to change the policy towards Cuba in December 2014 illustrates the limitations of a prevalent focus on crisis situations and systemic pressures in the existing literature. In this project, I combine the theoretical framework of Blavoukos and Bourantonis with insights from the literature focusing on the individual level of analysis. I present a multilevel model which offers a stronger explanatory power in the context of this particular case.

Methods

The proposed hypotheses are tested by using congruence procedures. With congruence testing one can look at the value of the independent and dependent variable and compare those values with the expected values derived from the theory. If these values are ² consistent with what the theory predicts, then “the possibility of a causal relationship is strengthened” (George and Bennett 2005:152). This is a method used for single case studies. With this method, I will need to establish the value of the independent variable and then check whether the dependent variable has the predicted outcome.

Furthermore, when testing the individual hypotheses, I use qualitative ³⁰ content analysis in order to establish the value of the independent variables in two of the four hypotheses: H3, and H4. ⁵⁷ Weber defines content analysis as “a research method that uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text” (Weber 1990: 9). A distinction can be made between quantitative and ⁵⁶ qualitative content analysis. This thesis focuses on qualitative content analysis where the interpretation of texts is central.

Operationalization

The Dependent Variable in all four hypotheses is the same, namely: the change of U.S. policy towards Cuba. This policy change entails the decision to re-establish the diplomatic ties with the island. These diplomatic ties had not been restored since 1961. The decision was made public on 17 December 2014. ⁵⁵ It is important to note that the dependent variable is the decision to re-establish diplomatic relations. The actual consequences of this decision are not taken into account. So far the trade embargo has not been lifted and Guantanamo Bay has not been restored under Cuban sovereignty,

another important change presumably needed for a complete normalisation of diplomatic ties (Nicoll and Delaney 2015). This DV will be measured categorically, the decision was made in 2014 and not before.

The Independent Variables are subsequently operationalized. The first two hypotheses are closely linked to each other and involve the degree of political influence of Cuban Americans on the decision made in late 2014.

- H1: The decrease in strength of influence of the Cuban American interest group led to the policy change of the U.S. towards Cuba.
- H2: The change in preferences of Cuban Americans regarding the U.S. foreign policy towards Cuba led to the policy change of the U.S. towards Cuba.

The Independent Variable in the first hypothesis is the strength of influence of the Cuban American interest group (also referred to as Cuban Americans). The capabilities of this interest group determine whether Cuban Americans are able to influence policy making. The strength of the Cuban American interest group will be measured as an ordinal variable and can be powerful or weak. For this hypothesis, I assume that their preferences remained the same namely: an isolationist approach to the island in order to force a regime change.

In order to measure the strength of the Cuban American interest group, it is necessary to look at the groups agency, which “comprises the conditions inherent to the group”, and its structure, which concerns the context in which the group operates (Rytz 2013: 37). Rytz argues that the structure can be divided in the institutional structure, which constitutes the political system, which has not changed and thus can be disregarded, and the ideational structure, which is the official U.S. foreign policy discourse at the time. I discard this dimension as well since although this has changed

after the end of the Cold War, it has not changed significantly regarding Cuba since and thus cannot account for a serious variation in the Cuban Americans' strength. During the Cold War, Cuba was seen as a communist threat and an important partner of the Soviet Union at 90 miles of the coast of the United States. The immediate threat diminished with the fall of the Soviet Union. After the end of the Cold War there has not been a significant change in political discourse regarding Cuba until December 2014. The indicators used to measure agency will be the demographic size of the immigrant community, the wealth of the Cuban Americans, and the political mobilisation of Cuban Americans. I argue that the strength of the Cuban American interest group has decreased when the demographic size of the group has decreased, their wealth has decreased, or the political mobilisation of the Cuban Americans has decreased. Variation in any of these indicators can have an influence on the strength of the Cuban American interest group, therefore a significant decrease in one of the indicators can be sufficient to confirm the expectations of H1. If the indicators show a slight decrease a combination of decrease in indicators is needed to confirm the hypothesis. If these factors did not decrease, I will reject the hypothesis.

Moving on to the second hypothesis that focuses on the role of the Cuban American community, I will assess whether the policy preferences have changed towards their country of origin. The Independent Variable of this hypothesis will be measured as an ordinal variable. The preferences can range from an isolationist foreign policy of the U.S. to a moderate foreign policy to supporting full engagement with Cuba. The preference of the Cuban American interest group predominantly was to have an isolationist approach towards Cuba in order to pressure the Castro family out of power. I will assess whether the preferences have changed to having a more moderate

policy towards the island, which entails that the Cuban Americans want some engagement yet not a full lift of the trade embargo, or if the Cuban Americans prefer full restoration of diplomatic and economic relations. If it is observable that this preference has changed to the support of a more moderate policy, then the hypothesis can be confirmed.

The next hypothesis concerns the political developments within Cuba.

- H3: The leadership change in Cuba, the power transition from Fidel Castro to Raul Castro, led to the policy change of the U.S. towards Cuba.

I measure the effect of the political transition within Cuba on US foreign policy making by looking how the developments on the island were perceived in the States. I argue that a positive reaction towards the developments will facilitate a change of policy. Even more so because it might highlight that a continuation of the current isolationist policy is more costly than an adjustment. The effect of the leadership change on policy making in the U.S. will be measured as an ordinal variable. The leadership change can be perceived as negative from the U.S. perspective when Raul Castro is considered to be continuing his brother's policies or imposing policies that are even more negative for U.S. interests. The leadership is perceived as neutral if there is little or no mention of the leadership change or if both positive and negative aspects of the political transition are mentioned. Finally, the leadership transition is perceived as positive when Raul is primarily considered as being a positive change from Fidel Castro for U.S. interests. I will confirm the hypothesis if there is a decisive positive perception regarding the leadership change.

The table below gives some indications of what types of words, expressions, and phrases are looked for and what these signal.

Table 1: Indication classification expressions H3

Positive	Negative
<p>“Some analysts see a possibility that such openings, if they were to come, would pave the way for a partial restoration of relations between the United States and Cuba” (Depalma and McKinley 2006)</p>	<p>“the Obama administration complains that Raul Castro is running the island exactly like his brother did, without fundamental freedoms and with continued abuses against political opponents” (Lacey 2009)</p>
<p>“Mr. Castro's decision to begin his tenure by meeting the Vatican's top diplomat, Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, a possible go-between with the United States and Europe, reflects his practical, no-nonsense style as well as his greater willingness to put ideology aside to achieve his goals than his brother often showed.” (McKinley 2008)</p>	<p>“But the truth is that Cuba's problems are mostly of the Castro brothers' own making. They may never end until the Castros' regime does.” (‘Same old Cuba’ 2011)</p>
<p>“And yet, on an island where a Castro has been in charge since 1959, he also seemed intent on changing how his successors will rule.” (Cave 2013)</p>	<p>“The extreme and unwarranted punishment meted out to Mr. Gross underscores how little really has changed in Havana since power passed from Fidel Castro to his brother” (‘An American Hostage in Havana’ 2011)</p>

The fourth, and perhaps most important, hypothesis concerns the individual beliefs and preferences of Barack Obama towards U.S. relations with Cuba.

- H4: President Barack Obama’s personal beliefs and preferences led to the policy change of the U.S. towards Cuba.

Although the personal beliefs and preferences of President Barack Obama might be the decisive Independent Variable, it is also the trickiest one to observe. This thesis focuses on the first mechanism of individual influence proposed by Jervis, namely Obama's personal values and preferences towards Cuba in particular². Only this mechanism might account for the actual content of the researched policy change. Did Obama have different, deep, and consistent preferences regarding Cuba that affected the decision making process? According to Jervis, preferences of a leader are linked more through a psychological predisposition than a clear theory (2013: 166). It is important to show that beliefs are powerful and autonomous, which means that the actions of a leader should be in line with his preferences and went against alternative courses of action and autonomous in that the preferences were long standing and existed before the decision I want to explain (2013: 166-167).

This IV will be measured as an ordinal variable. Obama's beliefs can range from being either favourable, neutral, or unfavourable regarding the normalisation of the relationship with the island. If the statements and remarks by Obama show that he wanted to engage with Cuba, it is evidence that his preferences are in line with the decision that has been made. If found that Obama mentioned Cuba before his presidency and discusses the island in a manner that is in line with the eventual policy decision, we can conclude that his beliefs were persistent. Thus, if the preferences of Obama have been favourable to engagement with Cuba and if he condemns the old policy, the fourth hypothesis can be confirmed.

² According to Jervis, there are four mechanisms how an individual can influence foreign policy making. First, the content of a policy can be affected by personal values and preferences. Second, the distinctive personality and style can influence decision making behaviour; for example whether a president is impulsive or risk-averse. Third, the political skills of a president can affect his ability to gain support for his preferred policies. And fourth, a president can generate different environments due to a different domestic base and international perception (Jervis 2013: 161).

Data

The data used to draw my conclusions from consists of both primary and secondary sources. To evaluate the hypotheses about the Cuban American interest groups, I use data from the academic debate regarding the Cuban diaspora and role of the Cuban American interest groups. As primary sources, I use data of the United States Census Bureau, the Pew Research Center, and the Cuban Research Institute of the Florida International University. These organisations present a good indication of the position of the Cuban Americans in the U.S. society and what their opinion is about certain issues by conducting surveys.

The analysis of the third hypothesis is solely based on secondary sources. The analysis consists of a content analysis of the news coverage in the U.S. in order to get an idea of how Raul Castro has been perceived in the U.S. compared to his brother. For the purpose of this thesis I focus on two newspapers, namely the New York Times and the Washington Post. These are both nationwide newspapers and regarded as being influential, especially regarding the coverage of international affairs (Yang 2003: 237). Furthermore, I have chosen the New York Times since it is considered as one of the most liberal newspapers and the Washington Post since it is more at the centre of the political spectrum (Groseclose and Milyo 2005). The time period chosen for the content analysis is 2006-2014 since that is the time period from the moment Raul Castro effectively gained power up until the announcement of the normalisation of diplomatic relations.

For the fourth hypothesis, I primarily use public statements of President Barack Obama. The statements, speeches, and remarks available on the website of the White

House where Obama mentions Cuba will be assessed. I also build on a speech available on the YouTube channel of Barack Obama of his 2008 presidential campaign.

Empirical Section

What follows are the analyses of the hypotheses. ¹⁸ This section is divided into three sub-sections. The first sub-section will discuss the first two hypotheses focusing on the influence of the Cuban Americans, the second sub-section will discuss the leadership change in Cuba, and the third sub-section focuses on the individual beliefs and preferences of Barack Obama.

Influence of Cuban Americans

This sub-section will focus on the first two hypotheses proposed in the theoretical section regarding the influence of the Cuban American interest group on the policy formation in December 2014. I assess the agency of the ¹ Cuban Americans and the content of the policy preferences of the ethnic interest group. Rytz (2013: 59) points out why it is important to inquire the ⁵¹ role of ethnic interest groups when evaluating foreign policy decision making:

“The picture of actors in the foreign policy-making process would be incomplete without the vibrant community of interest groups. By raising funds for election campaigns and by filling information gaps that legislative staffers are constantly facing due to a shortage of time and personnel, they play an important role in US politics.”

First, however, I will provide some historical background information about the political influence of the Cuban Americans. The Cuban diaspora is primarily influenced

by political events on the island. Perez argues therefore that the Cuban diaspora is “vitaly interested in U.S. policy toward the island” (2014). I will focus here on a brief overview of the different waves of Cuban migrants that came to the U.S. after the revolution led by Fidel Castro. The first wave of immigrants arrived between 1959 and 1962 and the flow of people was then dominated by the Cuban elite since the revolution affected foremost the upper section of the society (Perez 2014). The second wave started in the autumn of 1965 and lasted until 1973. During this wave Cubans in the United States were allowed to repatriate their relatives. In 1980, a third wave lasted for only six months when Cuba allowed unrestricted migration. However, approximately 125,000 arrived at the U.S. whereas the other two waves together brought 460,000 people. Due to the unrestricted migration, also people from the lower segments of society moved to the U.S. 1994 was the year when the fourth wave started when Cuba decided not to stop Cubans that tried to leave the island. In an agreement with the Cuban government, the U.S. decided to let 20,000 Cubans a year into the country and the migrants that reached U.S. soil as well (Perez 2014). The different waves of immigrants account for the heterogeneity of the Cuban diaspora in the U.S. today.

Until the beginning of the 1980s, the Cuban American exile groups were neither well organised nor influential (Haney and Vanderbush 1999: 347). The largest segment of the Cuban Americans were living in Florida. However, despite the concentration in Florida, there were organisational weaknesses due to fragmentation within the Cuban American exile group (Haney and Vanderbush 1999: 347). In addition, Cuban exiles conducted a number of bombings in Miami in the mid-1970s as a protest against the Castro regime. This negatively affected the public perception of the Cuban Americans. At the same time, Ronald Reagan became President of the United States and steered

U.S. foreign policy towards a more hard-line course towards Cuba (Haney and Vanderbush 1999: 347). Cuba was an essential element in Reagan's explanation of the security threat posed by certain regimes ¹ in Central America and the Caribbean. The ²⁶ administration and the Cuban Americans "had much to gain from the other's success in ¹⁰ shaping public views about Cuba" (Haney and Vanderbush 1999: 347). There is some discussion about the actual creation of the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) and whether it was the Cuban American community acting on its own or whether they were supported by Reagan's administration.

The CANF had similar views regarding the island; they were heavily opposing the Castro regime ²¹ (Haney and Vanderbush 1999: 348). It is important to note that not the entire Cuban American community felt represented by the CANF. There was a group that wanted to increase the dialogue with Fidel Castro. However, they did not have the same strong relationship with the government as the CANF had (Haney and Vanderbush 1999: 350).

Several scholars have pointed out the influence of the Cuban American interest group ¹ in U.S. foreign policy making (Rytz 2013, ⁵⁰ Haney and Vanderbush 1999, Brenner, Haney, Vanderbush 2002). The remainder of this sub-section will focus on the first two hypotheses proposed in the theoretical section and assess whether the influence of the Cuban Americans has changed. Rytz makes a distinction between material resources and ideational resources when evaluating interest groups and their agency. The material resources are quite straight forward and influence the capacity of the interest group to act in the political field. The ideational resources are concerning ethnic collective identity power and the generation of interests (Rytz 2013: 44). This aspect of interest group agency will be further assessed when looking at the content of the policy

preferences with H2. The focus of H1 is on the material resources of the Cuban Americans. Therefore, I will look at demographics, wealth, and political mobilisation as indicators.

Demographics. The United States Census Bureau is the organisation that keeps track of data about U.S. population and economy. One of their tasks is to count U.S. residents, which happens every 10 years. The latest official consensus was in 2010, however, every year the Census Bureau publishes an estimate of the current state of the data. The latest data available is the estimate for July 1 2014. The Census Bureau divides the ethnicity of the U.S. citizens into Hispanic and not-Hispanic, when they collect data. They also let people identify with the category Cuban. The total number of self-identified Cubans in the United States at the time of the 2010 census was 1.7 million. This is an increase compared to 2000, when the total Cuban population in the United States was 1.2 million (American FactFinder). This means that the Cuban population in 2010 was 1,4 times larger than it was in 2001. The difference between the total population of the United States between 2000 and 2010 is 1.1 times. You can conclude that the Cuban American population grew faster than the total U.S. population. When calculated to percentage of U.S. population, the Cuban Americans grew from 0.44% to 0.57% of the total U.S. population between 2000 and 2010.

These numbers are not the most recent. The Pew Research Center also assessed the Cuban American population numbers provided by the Census Bureau as well as through surveys it conducted. The results represent the state of play of 2013, shortly before the decision was made to restore diplomatic ties with Cuba. Pew estimated that the Cuban American population had grown close to 2 million in 2013. These are the

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people that identify themselves as Hispanics from Cuban origin which means that either they themselves are born on Cuba and have moved to the U.S., or their ancestry is from Cuba (López 2015). I would argue that this is a relatively small increase. However, these numbers prevent us from rejecting the first hypothesis based solely on demographic statistics.

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Wealth. According to the Pew Research Center, the median income of Cuban Americans, of the age 16 or older, was \$25,000 in 2013. This is higher than the median income of the total Hispanic population in 2013 which was \$21,900 but lower than that of the total U.S. population which was \$30,000 (López 2015). Compared to data published about the median income of Cuban Americans in 2007 until 2010, you can see that the median income of the Cuban Americans has been relatively stable. The median income went from \$26,310 in 2007 to \$25,000 in 2010 which is the same median as in 2013 (Motel and Patten 2012, Pew Research Center 2009). Looking at the pure numbers does not seem to suggest a lot of change in the years leading to the policy decision to normalise diplomatic ties with Cuba. Leogrande states that the CANF was 65
able to influence U.S. policy making towards the island from 1981 until 2008 (2015: 476). It did so by funding public officials that supported an isolationist approach and punishing those that hinted at engagement. The trend of the Cuban American migration that entailed that the newer generations were primarily from the lower social classes rather than the mere elite might have had an effect on the funding of the conservative CANF.

Rytz has assessed the influence of the CANF and states that around 2000 the Cuban American community on average performed better economically than the rest of

the Latino group. Their businesses had higher revenues, they displayed more entrepreneurship, and had higher economic success (Rytz 2013: 157). Cuban Americans did well in business although their dominance decreased compared to other Hispanic groups (Rytz 2013: 157). Rytz states that although the newer generations were from the lower socio-economic classes, the ¹Cuban American community was able to maintain its socioeconomic status in the U.S. over the 1990s (2013: 158). The Cuban Americans scored below the U.S. average but above the Latino average in education and profession. Nevertheless, the elites continued to perform economically better than the newer generations of Cuban migrants.

Political Mobilisation. An important advantage that the Cuban American lobby had was that it has historically been based in two important electoral states: Florida and New Jersey (Leogrande 2015: 477). In addition, according to Leogrande, no other parties, individuals, or interests group regarded the policy issue of the relations with Cuba as salient. Hence, the Cuban Americans were able to maintain its level of influence primarily because “Cuba ceased to be significant for U.S. foreign policy” (Leogrande 2015: 477). This entails that there was little resistance to the shaping of the foreign policy issue by the Cuban American interest group.

Another aspect pointed out by Leogrande is the fact that the attitude towards the U.S. policy changed with the arrival of newer generations (2015: 478). Political mobilisation is closely linked to the second hypothesis as well, although the difference lies between the material mobilisation and the content of the Cuban American mobilisation. However, I do address this issue here since Leogrande argues that the changes in preferences were not immediately reflected into voting behaviour since the

newer generations did not obtain U.S. citizenship in the same numbers as the older generation of migrants did in addition to a higher percentage of “older” Cubans registered to vote (2015: 478). The changes in the Cuban American electorate were observable for the first time in 2008 (Leogrande 2015: 479).

The party affiliation among the Cuban American community reflects a change in political mobilisation as well. The majority of the Cuban American voters in Miami traditionally registered to the Republican Party. This differentiates them from the other Hispanics who are generally listed as Democrats (Krogstad 2014). The percentages differ between different sources, from 70% in 1991 to 53% in 2014 according to the Cuban Research Institute (CRI) and from 64% 1993 to 47% in 2013 according to the Pew Research Center (Cuban Research Institute 2014, Krogstad 2014). This difference is likely due to the fact that the Pew Research Center focuses on the Cuban American community in the entire U.S. while CRI merely focuses on the community based in Miami. However, both show a clear declining trend in the support for the Republicans among Cuban Americans. At the same time, the support for the Democrats and Independent slowly increased. When the Cuban Americans who are not registered to vote are taken into consideration, the percentage leaning towards the Republicans is even lower (Krogstad 2014).

Party affiliation is being discussed since Republicans and Democrats generally have a different perception about how to best approach Cuba. Republicans are conservative and by and large have always been for an isolationist policy towards the Castro regime and refused cooperation with the Cuban government as long as there would not be significant democratic reforms. Democrats have generally been open for

more engagement with the island (Rubenzer 2011: 110). In the following analysis of H2 the political preferences of the Cuban Americans will be discussed in more detail.

Looking back at the first hypothesis, I state that the strength of the Cuban Americans has not decreased and is therefore still powerful. Since I assumed for the purpose of the research of this hypothesis that the preferences did not change, the expectations of H1 are not confirmed.

However, the Cuban American community might still have been of influence for the policy change late 2014. The second aspect I am considering is the content of the preferences of the Cuban Americans. I question whether the preferences changed and thereby became more in line with the outcome of the discussed policy change. In order to test this, it is necessary to assess what the preferences of the Cuban Americans were in the period leading to the official announcement ¹² of the re-establishment of diplomatic relations with Cuba.

The objectives of the Cuban American interest group traditionally were primarily articulated through the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF). As mentioned earlier, the CANF gained a lot of influence during the period of Reagan's presidency. Brenner, Haney, and Vanderbush argue that the CANF lost significant influence in the early 1990s (2002: 198). Clinton opened up the debate, by focusing on trade he created the opportunity for other interest groups to get involved as well (Brenner, Haney, and Vanderbush 2002: 198). The CANF was not the only group that put pressure on the policy making. There were a lot more voices that spoke against the trade-embargo. ²⁹ Furthermore, the end of the Cold War decreased the dominance of the

security interests in assessing the relationship with Cuba (Brenner, Haney, and Vanderbush 2002: 1999). Other interest groups for example focused on agricultural trade joined the stage trying to exert influence on foreign policy formation. Still, the preferences of the Cuban Americans were reflected in the U.S. policy towards Cuba until the end of 2014.

However, it is essential to consider the “newer” generations that moved to the United States after 1980 or even after the Cold War. The Pew Research Center has several analyses of the Cuban American community and their political attitudes and affiliations. In 2004, there was already an increase in support for dialogue with the Cuban government from 40% in 1991 to 56%. Furthermore, although the expectation for change in Cuba remained low in 2004, only 25% thought it was imminent, it was an increase of 9% compared to 2000 (Pew Hispanic Center 2006).

⁴⁸ The Cuban Research Institute (CRI) of the Florida International University has been tracking the opinions of Cuban Americans regarding the policy of the United States since 1991 (Cuban Research Institute 2014). The survey is conducted among Cubans in Miami, where the majority of the Cuban American community is settled. The report of 2014 is especially interesting for this research since it reflects the opinion of the Cuban Americans around the period that the decision to engage with Cuba was made.

In 2014, 71% of the Cuban American respondents stated that they did not believe the embargo worked very well or at all (Cuban Research Institute 2014). A slight majority opposed the continuation of the embargo, and this majority is bigger for the younger generations and those that arrived later in the United States. This is an important indicator for the hypothesis that the preferences of the Cuban Americans have

changed since both the newer and younger generations are quite strongly against a continuation of the old policy of the United States. However, it is important to maintain some caution with this statement since the embargo and the re-establishment of diplomatic ties are two distinct elements of the ⁴⁷ U.S. policy towards Cuba.

Nevertheless, the 2014 survey showed that 68% of the respondents were in favour of a re-establishment of diplomatic ⁴⁶ relations between the U.S. and Cuba. Compared to ten years earlier, that is an increase of 12% (Cuban Research Institute 2014). On this point it becomes clear that the newer and younger generations are predominantly in favour of engagement as well. An interesting point the survey showed is that there is a clear divide between those registered to vote and those not registered to vote. The group of Cuban Americans that are not registered to vote shows an 83% preference to re-establish diplomatic ties compared to 55% in the group that is registered to vote. This links back to the argument Leogrande made: namely, that the preferences were not well reflected since the newer and younger generations are not always registered to vote.

Besides showing the results of the survey in 2014, the CRI report also compares the results with previous years and thereby identifies trends. The main trends according to the survey among Cuban Americans in Miami show that the support for the embargo has decreased significantly since 1991 and support for unrestricted travel has increased (Cuban Research Institute 2014).

These results show that the preferences of the Cuban Americans have significantly changed over the last decades. The expectations of the second hypothesis seem to be confirmed. However, since I am using congruence method, the confirmation of the hypothesis does not show a strong causal mechanism. By confirming the

hypothesis I mainly state that the value of the independent variable corresponds to the value of the dependent variable as is suggested by the theory. Blavoukos and Bourantonis argue that domestic interest groups can influence decision making by supporting certain policy courses of action. Since the strength of the Cuban American community has not decreased, I state that the content of the preferences influenced the policy outcome.

Influence of Leadership Change in Cuba

Fidel Castro had been in power since 1959, when his brother took over power first on a provisional basis in July 2006 and later permanently in February 2008 (Erikson and Wander 2009: 10). ³⁶ Fidel Castro was the leader of the revolution and was considered to be a charismatic leader (Hoffman 2009: 230). Due to the charismatic personality of Fidel Castro it was expected that his succession would be problematic. The regime was leaning on his person. However, Cuba has experienced a gradual and smooth succession to Raul Castro (Hoffman 2009: 230). With the leadership transition, certain changes in Cuba's global perception were to be expected as well. According to Erikson and Wander, Raul changed certain aspects of Cuba's foreign policy which led to a continuation of global rapprochement (2009: 10). The foreign policy changes entailed the replacement of a couple of cabinet members and a different attitude towards international affairs. Generally, Raul is considered to be less outspoken and provocative than his brother Fidel (Erikson and Wander 2009: 10).

The question here is whether this power transition also influenced the policy change of the U.S. I assess this by looking at the perception of the leadership change in ³⁵ the news coverage of the United States. Primary sources on how the leadership change

is perceived are absent since there have not been clear statements from the U.S. government. When it became clear that Fidel would resign, there were voices from the U.S. calling for a democratic transition and respect for human rights, for example by President Bush (Thompson 2007).

As mentioned in the operationalization section, the two newspapers assessed are the New York Times and the Washington Post. Through LexisNexis I have searched for all newspaper articles that mention the name of Raul Castro between 2006 and 2014. This resulted in 106 articles ²⁵ from the New York Times and 29 articles from the Washington Post. I sort the selected articles on the basis of whether they indicate that Raul Castro has been a positive change compared to Fidel Castro, whether the article is neutral about the transition thus not making any explicit statements about the differences between the two leaders, or negative, which indicates that either Raul Castro continues the same policy as his brother or is perceived as an even worse leader than his brother. The fourth category is 'not relevant', these are articles that mention Raul Castro but do not reflect his policies. In the table below you can see the categorisation of the assessed newspaper articles.

Table 2: Categorisation Newspaper Articles Raul Castro

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Not relevant
New York Times	16	55	10	25
Washington Post	7	6	5	11

The Washington Post in general had shorter articles than the New York Times, these articles often just described the latest developments in Cuba and left little space for judgement, analysis, or comparison with Fidel Castro. Therefore, a lot of articles are

placed in the neutral category. The number of articles from the New York Times categorized as neutral is high as well. However, this is often through a more elaborate consideration of the in general longer articles. Articles in this category either did not discuss or show any difference or similarity between the two brothers or were very balanced in their judgement. In these cases the analyses were careful, discussing some developments while being critical about actual change.

Overall, the New York Times has reported Raul Castro's political actions and his presidency in more detail and there are several articles that compare his decisions with those of his older brother Fidel. Although in all articles there is some caution about the actual differences and the extent of the intended changes suggested by Raul, it seems overall that Raul is being considered as a more pragmatic leader. He seems open for changes on the island. Especially, his wish to push for economic reforms is frequently mentioned. Raul Castro is portrayed as a leader that wants to guide its country to more prosperity by opening up some of the economy. Nevertheless, the New York Times does constantly reflect some responses of regular Cubans who are very wary of actual changes. The economic reforms are not as profound as promised, do not reach the average Cubans, and do not lead to more freedom.

In 2013, several articles report that Raul Castro intends to retire after his last 5-year term and possibly hand the presidency to a younger generation (Cave 2013, Cave and Burnett 2013). Again, the reporting is cautious, stating that there is no intention to disregard socialism or to open up the political system to more parties. However, it is generally presented as a positive political change, one that did not happen in over 50 years. Different presidential administrations of the United States used to state that they did not want to engage with Cuba as long as the Castro regime was in place (Thompson

2007). A hint that the era where a member of the Castro family is head of state will soon come to an end can be considered as a positive development in the eyes of the U.S. However, the articles which solely discuss the possible successor of Raul Castro or the announcement of Raul's last 5-year term without mentioning Fidel, are categorized as neutral. This thesis assesses if the transition from Fidel to Raul Castro influenced the sudden policy change. The Obama administration decided to engage with Cuba while Raul Castro was still in power, they did not wait until the announced end of his term.

In an article in the Washington Post, an upcoming visit of the pope to the island in 2012 is being discussed ("Cuba awaits the pope"). This is one of the clear examples of the two-sided assessment of Raul's intentions. The article reports the wish for discussion with the U.S. from Cuba and the modest economic reforms imposed by Raul. However, it subsequently makes clear that Cuba is not willing to implement any democratic reforms and wants to follow the path of China and Vietnam. This makes it complicated to evaluate whether Raul Castro has been perceived as a positive change compared to his brother and whether there are significant differences. This specific article has been listed in the neutral category, since it shows both sides.

Raul's openness and willingness to negotiate with the United States is discussed in more articles. However, they also note that he wants the countries to be treated as equals, something the U.S. has long denied since it wanted to see some democratic reforms first. These democratic, political reforms have been repeatedly denied by Raul Castro. Thus, Raul Castro is more open to discussion with Cuba's large neighbour but due to the lack of political reforms this has neither happened immediately nor smoothly.

Generally, the news coverage of the leadership transition, the policy reforms, and announced policy reforms of Raul Castro have been reported cautiously by both

newspapers. They do mention the economic reforms Raul intended and implemented but remain wary of the actual results. Some discuss Raul as being more pragmatic as his brother and therefore initiating small reforms that are needed to let the regime survive. However, these reforms are implemented carefully, as Raul does not want to abandon socialism. Multiple articles mention that Raul Castro takes Vietnam and China as models where there have been economic openings while maintaining a socialist regime (Lacey 2008, DePalma 2006, Forero 2006). In addition, the United States is said not to be satisfied with the changes, claiming they have not been profound enough (Lacey 2008).

It is difficult to draw a concrete conclusion from the qualitative content analysis of the newspaper articles in the New York Times and the Washington Post. Both media sources suggest that Raul Castro is more open to having a dialogue with the United States, something his brother was not willing to do. The hypothesis is that the leadership transition in Cuba led to the decision to restore diplomatic ties between the two countries. The suggestion that dialogue between the two governments became possible is therefore extremely important. However, the U.S. denied some of this dialogue since political reforms were lacking.

Raul Castro announced multiple reforms, most of them economic. Nevertheless, he suggested an opening of the political debate on the island as well. Both newspapers stated numerous times that these announcements remained merely talk and little action. Moreover, Raul Castro emphasized that he did not intend to discard socialism, and rather he would take China's political and economic system as an example.

On the basis of these results I can neither confidently confirm nor reject the third hypothesis. The results are displaying both some change and at the same time

arguments that there has been little actual transformation on the island. Furthermore, the evidence is all derived from secondary sources and hence is less convincing than when it would have come from primary sources such as statements of Barack Obama regarding the transition from Fidel to Raul. However, I will argue that since it is implied that there has been some opening of political debate and some small economic reforms, there has been some momentum to start the negotiations. Looking at the categorisation of the newspaper articles, the number of articles that are positive towards the leadership transition is slightly higher than those that are categorized as negative. Thus, I tentatively confirm the expectations of the third hypothesis.

Influence of the Beliefs and Preferences of Barack Obama

The last hypothesis concerns the individual beliefs and preferences of President Barack Obama. Being the ³⁴ President of the United States, he has unique capabilities and the authority to set agendas and “coordinate and oversee the actions of the many agencies with a stake in foreign policy” (Lindsey and Hobbs 2015: 1091). Furthermore, Obama as president has a key ¹³ role in the decision making process. Many foreign policy decisions need to be made by the president (Lindsey and Hobbs 2015: 1091). Although Obama needs Congress to lift the trade embargo, he was able to make the decision to begin with restoring the diplomatic ties between the two countries. How much did the personal beliefs and preferences of Obama influence the policy redirection? There have been ten presidents before him that did not significantly change the policy in the direction of re-establishing diplomatic ties.

Under president Dwight Eisenhower the relations between the two countries started to deteriorate when he instituted a ban on almost all exports to Cuba (Lee 2014:

2). John F. Kennedy subsequently implemented the full trade embargo on the island in 1962 which also included travel bans (Lee 2014: 2, Erikson and Wander 2009: 11). As mentioned before, Reagan was a strong advocate of an isolationist approach to the island. After the Cold War the economic embargo was tightened by the Helms-Burton Act, signed by George H. W. Bush in 1992 and passed into law under Bill Clinton in 1996. The Helms-Burton Act entailed that the President would have less power to change the policy and that Congress would need to be involved in any modifications (Brenner, Haney, and Vanderbush 2002: 194-195). The George W. Bush administration was in favour of the embargo and strongly enforced it (Lee 2014: 3, Erikson and Wander 2009: 11). However, not all administrations always were completely closed to negotiations with the Cuban government. Henry Kissinger opened dialogue with Cuba, and Jimmy Carter had plans for normalising relations. However, neither carried through a policy change as profound as the one announced on 17 December 2014 (Haney and Vanderbush 1999: 346, Leogrande 2015: 483).

Landler emphasizes as well that the approach of Obama towards Cuba was unique, especially when compared to that of Hillary Clinton who also ran as candidate of the Democratic Party during the 2008 presidential elections (2016). He argues that Clinton's views were still influenced by the Cold War and that she would only consider engaging with Cuba once the government changed, in order not to upset Cuban American voters. During her period as secretary of state, her views did change though, and she recommended Obama to push for a lift of the trade embargo. However, Obama was the person that took the risks of starting negotiations with Cuba and Landler states that it is unsure if Clinton would have taken these risks if she was in his place. According to Landler, Obama's desire to negotiate with Cuba fell in line with his wish

to engage with all traditional adversaries of the U.S., for example with Iran as well (2016).

To further evaluate the specific preferences of Barack Obama regarding Cuba, I begin with an analysis of the speech Obama gave on 17 December 2014. I will then go back to older speeches, statements, and remarks by Obama to see whether the statements made on 17 December 2014 can be traced back to his previous beliefs. The time period I am looking at is 2008-2014. This covers the period of his presidential campaign up until the announcement in 2014 that the two countries would start to normalise diplomatic relations.

At the announcement on 17 December 2014, Obama informed the public about the changes in policy towards Cuba. The statements and language he used in this speech are fundamental in order to trace whether these views have been consistent over time. From the start of the announcement, Obama used strong language that made clear that there was a severe redirection of policy towards Cuba. “Today, the United States of America is changing its relationship with the people of Cuba. In the most significant changes in our policy in more than fifty years, we will end an outdated approach that, for decades, has failed to advance our interests, and instead we will begin to normalize relations between our two countries” (Obama 2014). This is how Obama opened his statement: by strongly condemning the previous policy and pointing to the ineffectiveness of the policy that was initiated over 50 years ago. His rejection of the previous policy is recurrent in the statement: “I believe we can do more to support the Cuban people and promote our values through engagement. After all, these 50 years have shown that isolation has not worked. It’s time for a new approach”, “Unfortunately, our sanctions on Cuba have denied Cubans access to technology that

has empowered individuals around the globe”, “I do not believe we can keep doing the same thing for over five decades and expect a different result”, and “Today, America chooses to cut loose the shackles of the past so as to reach for a better future” (Obama 2014).

Obama stated in 2014 that his longstanding opinion had been that neither the Cuban nor the American interests were well served by the old policy and that he had promised to re-examine the policy when he came into power. Therefore, it is necessary to test whether this statement is correct. One speech delivered by Barack Obama on 23 May 2008 at a convention of the Cuban American National Foundation is crucial in its illustration of the beliefs and preferences of the then presidential candidate. In this speech, he clarified his views regarding U.S. policy towards Latin America and also Cuba in specific. Since this speech took place during the presidential elections of 2008, Obama was actively differentiating himself from Bush and especially John McCain who was the Republican nominee to run for the presidency. Obama suggested that it is fundamental to engage with Latin America and that this had not been done sufficiently: “Instead of engaging the people of the region, we’ve acted as if we can still dictate terms unilaterally. [...] For far too long, Washington has engaged in outdated debates and stuck to tired blueprints on drugs and trade, on democracy and development – even though they won’t meet the tests of the future” (Obama 2008).

Rather, Obama suggested that a new course should be put in place: “It’s time for a new alliance of the Americas. [...] After decades pressing for top-down reform, we need an agenda that advances democracy, security, and opportunity from the bottom up” (Obama 2008). An essential aspect of his speech on 23 May 2008 is the emphasis of the promotion of democracy. From here, he then specified his policy intentions regarding

Cuba. His criticism of the old U.S. policy became apparent here again: “a policy that’s ¹¹ done nothing to advance freedom for the Cuban people” (Obama 2008). In this speech, Obama mentioned his desire to engage with Cuba through diplomacy, “it is time to pursue direct diplomacy” (Obama 2008). Through diplomatic conversation, Obama believed to be able to push for change in the direction of free speech, free press, and free and fair elections. Some of the more specific ideas that are offered were his desires to allow for ³³ Cuban Americans to travel unrestricted to the island and send remittances.

The statements made during the 2008 campaign speech are consistent with the statements made in the official announcement of 17 December 2014 to restore the diplomatic ties with Cuba. Furthermore, I argue that this speech shows that Obama has a strong commitment to his individual beliefs regarding the Cuba policy. The speech was held at a convention of the Cuban American National Foundation, an interest group that traditionally has always been in favour of a tough and isolationist approach towards the Castro regime. Therefore, Obama was at the time making a costly signal, one that might have been risky during his campaign. Leogrande mentions this as well: by deciding to go for a moderate approach Obama appealed to the expanding group of Cuban Americans that were advocates of engagement with the island and “defied conventional wisdom that only a ‘tough on Cuba’ platform would sell in south Florida” (2015: 479).

However, it remains important to assess whether Obama was always consistent in his intentions after he took office. Other speeches, statements, and remarks indicate that he did stick to the same opinion, although sometimes framed more carefully, with an emphasis on the changes that were needed on the island. In another important speech ³ at the opening ceremony of the Summit of the Americas in 2009, the then president of

the United States Barack Obama discussed his intentions towards Cuba once again. In this speech, Obama called again for engagement, “I’m here to launch a new chapter of engagement that will be sustained throughout my administration” (Obama 2009). Obama’s language was primarily focused on solidarity, being neighbours, and looking at the future. The focus lied on cooperation and working towards shared goals. This was a more general approach towards Latin America. When Obama spoke more specifically about Cuba, he stated that “The United States seeks a new beginning with Cuba” (2009). He reasserted that he facilitated the possibility for Cuban Americans to travel to Cuba and to send remittances. When talking about Cuba in particular, Obama repeated his wish for engagement “I’m prepared to have my administration engage with the Cuban government on a wide range of issues” (2009).

Besides his intentions of engagement, this speech expressed his discontent with the previous policy once more. There are several statements in which he directly criticized the old policy and the stale debates. However, I argue that this also becomes apparent through his use of words and expressions that indicate a wish for a *new* policy direction. Some examples are: “I’m here to launch a *new* chapter of engagement” (emphasis added), “I came here to deal with the *future*” (emphasis added), “That’s the *new* direction that we can pursue” (emphasis added), “a *new* beginning” (emphasis added), and “we can move U.S.-Cuban relations in a *new* direction” (emphasis added).

At other occasions, Obama answered questions regarding Cuba with the same kind of language and message. In a visit to Chile in March 2011, the emphasis remained primarily on supporting the Cuban people. He reaffirmed that the policy towards Cuba was changing and he would break with the old policy (Obama 2011a). However, he asserted that the independence of the people is most important and that they should have

the right to determine their own future. During the roundtable, Obama repeated this statement: “we are open to a new relationship with Cuba if the Cuban government starts taking the proper steps to open up its own country and its own – and provide the space and respect for human rights that would allow the Cuban people to determine their own destiny” (Obama 2011b). Obama puts some emphasis on the conditions for engagement: “as long as I’m President I will always be prepared to change our Cuba policy if and when we start seeing a serious intention on the part of the Cuban government to provide liberty for its people” (Obama 2011b). Thereby, he was somewhat more careful in his phrasing of his intentions to engage with Cuba and specified clearly that there were conditions to be met by Cuba in order for the U.S. to engage with the island.

This is a trend that was observable in 2012 as well during a joint press conference with President Santos of Colombia. When asked about Cuba, Obama repeated the measures he already took, loosening travel restrictions and remittances, but added that the Cuban regime neither respected democracy nor human rights yet and that hindered cooperation between the two countries (Obama 2012). However, he also stated that he was “hopeful that a transition begins to take place inside of Cuba” (Obama 2012). This language of hope and opportunity signalled that Obama anticipated development between the two countries and was optimistic about such a development.

When Obama spoke at a fundraising event in Miami, Florida in 2013, he repeated the need for an adjustment of a policy that is over 50 years old (Obama 2013). He reasserted that the goals were primarily the same. However, he stated that “what we have to do in continually find new mechanisms and new tools to speak out on behalf of the issues we care so deeply about” (Obama 2013).

Looking at the selected speeches and remarks, Obama's beliefs and preferences tend to stay consistent. Throughout the years, three elements kept returning in his statements: First, the rejection of the old policy that had been in place for over 5 decades and did not have the desired effect; Second, the necessity of a new direction in U.S.-Cuban relations; and Third, the accomplishments of the restored travel allowances and remittances being sent to Cuba by Cuban Americans. The strong condemning of the old policy and the aspiration for a new policy and engagement with Cuba firmly indicate that Obama was in favour of a normalisation of diplomatic ties.

Additionally, Obama wanted to extend a hand to other traditional adversaries of the U.S. as well (Landler 2016). The foreign policy of Obama regarding Cuba in that sense has been consistent with his overall aspirations for U.S. foreign policy. Contrary to his predecessor George W. Bush, Obama saw the U.S. as leading from behind and opposed the active democracy promotion, regime transition was supposed to come from within the state (Castro Santos and Teixeira 2015: 129-131). The re-establishment of relations with Cuba follows this notion. Obama rejected to old Cuba policy and believed that the interests of the Cuban people would be better served by engagement between the two countries.

The expectation of H4 was that when the decision was made to normalise diplomatic ties, the preferences of the president would be demonstrably in favour of the suggested policy, here the re-establishment of diplomatic relations. I argue that qualitative content analysis carried out in this section indicates that Obama had been in favour of the normalisation of diplomatic relations. As mentioned in the operationalization section, it is essential for the preferences to be powerful and autonomous in order to be able to argue that the individual preferences of the president

had an influence on the policy redirection. The analysis illustrates that Obama's preferences were in line with his action to re-establish diplomatic ties, have been consistent, and went against the old policy. Therefore, the expectations of the fourth hypothesis, that suggest that the individual beliefs and preferences of Barack Obama led to the change in U.S. foreign policy towards Cuba, seem to be confirmed.

Conclusion

The objective of this thesis was to provide an explanation of why the United States decided to change its foreign policy towards Cuba in December 2014. The timing of the foreign policy change was especially puzzling since the relations between the two countries had not been improved in over 5 decades. Most traditional IR theories could not provide a satisfying explanation. The Foreign Policy Analysis discipline could contribute by focusing on domestic factors and moving from an exclusive focus on the systemic level of analysis to an evaluation of the joint effects of the international, national, and individual levels of analysis as well. This thesis is based on the theory proposed by Blavoukos and Bourantonis who present several origins of foreign policy change. I have assessed the possible domestic and international origins of change and decided to complement their theory by including the individual level of analysis as well. Therefore, I have discussed the potential influence of Barack Obama in the decision making process.

The research has resulted in the rejection of the first hypothesis that the strength of the Cuban American interest group declined and therefore led to the policy change. However, an analysis of the attitude of the Cuban Americans showed that the younger

generations and the generations of Cubans that migrated to the United States in the later waves were more positive towards a moderate policy and supported dialogue with the Cuban government as well as an increase in the percentage of Cuban Americans that are in favour of an ending of the trade embargo. Therefore, I have confirmed the second hypothesis that the changes in preferences of the Cuban Americans led to the policy redirection. The third hypothesis focused on the role of the leadership transition in Cuba. The evidence for the influence of the power transition from Fidel Castro to Raul Castro on the policy outcome of December 2014 has not been completely satisfying. Therefore the hypothesis is only tentatively confirmed. The influence of the preferences of Obama has been demonstrated and the fourth hypothesis is therefore also confirmed.

Thus, two hypotheses are convincingly confirmed, both the change in preferences of the ¹ Cuban American interest group and the individual beliefs and preferences of Barack Obama seem to have been of significant influence. However, in the context of this project, the hypotheses suggested in the theoretical framework were competing ones. Due to the problems of isolating the causal effects of each hypothesis, it is difficult to decisively conclude which factor, the individual beliefs or the change in preferences of the Cuban American interest group, was the determining one. Nevertheless, the variation in both variables helps to understand what was unique about the situation leading to the decision to re-establish diplomatic ⁴³ relations between the U.S. and Cuba in 2014.

Perhaps the change of preferences of the Cuban American community was an enabling condition which was necessary for Obama to be able to actually execute his policy preferences. Here the role of the power transition in Cuba comes in play as well. Although the hypothesis is only tentatively confirmed, I argue that the perception

displayed in the newspapers assessed was not convincing enough to cause the change by itself. Nevertheless, it might have been a factor that contributed to a permissive environment. My prediction is that the tempering of the traditionally isolationist policy preference of the Cuban Americans and the leadership change in Cuba were beneficial for Obama since this meant that there were less constraints to redirect U.S. foreign policy.

However, in order to confirm this prediction, further research should be conducted. For this thesis I have used congruence method to confirm or reject my hypotheses. Congruence method shows correlation between variables but cannot clearly disclose the causal mechanisms between them. Since the policy redirection is so recent, the relevant factors still needed to be indicated, which I have done by using congruence methods. Nevertheless, process tracing should help provide more convincing evidence of a causal mechanism between individual preferences and policy outcomes. I have not used the process tracing method due to problems with data accessibility. Furthermore, ⁴² content analysis is a research method that is relatively subjective. The coding is based on my personal interpretation of what would indicate a wish for change of the old policy towards Cuba and what I interpret as a positive attitude towards negotiations and engagement with the island. Elite interviews with Barack Obama and member from his administration as well as with other parties involved during the negotiations to re-establish diplomatic ties would significantly contribute to shedding light on the exact causes and effects. Unfortunately, this went beyond the scope of this thesis.

To conclude, a lot of literature suggests the importance of a crisis or the presence of a critical issue to the regime for a foreign policy to change significantly. Other literature suggests that a cost-benefit analysis that shows that the current policy is being

too costly and ineffective might be the origin of change. The foreign policy redirection of the U.S. towards Cuba in 2014 has been an example that is not necessary to have a direct pressing issue, crisis, or war to change foreign policy and it is not sufficient to have a costly and ineffective policy in order to adjust foreign policy.

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