



Obama Announces End of “Wet Foot/Dry Foot” Policy for Cuban Refugees

In a statement posted on the White House  website on January 12, President Obama announced the ending of the 1995 “wet-foot/dry foot” policy put in place by President Bill Clinton, which allowed Cuban refugees who set foot on U.S. soil after fleeing their communist homeland to be granted asylum and to pursue legal residency.

When first put into place, the “wet-foot/dry foot” policy represented a more restrictive revision of the Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966, which had allowed any native or citizen of Cuba who came to the United States after January 1, 1959 (when Fidel Castro assumed power as Cuba’s dictator) and had been physically present for at least one year to be eligible for permanent U.S. residency. That policy pertained to Cubans intercepted at sea enroute to the United States, as well as those who physically set foot on U.S. soil, because at that time the United States was reluctant to send people back to the communist dictatorship ruled by Castro.

A report in the *New York Times* observed that the Obama administration had long insisted that it was not planning to change the “wet-foot/dry foot” policy following the president’s move in 2014 toward normalized relations with Cuba. However, noted the *Times*, “the thaw prompted speculation that once diplomatic relations resumed, as they did in 2015, the arrangement would end.”

The AP reported that according to statistics published by the Department of Homeland Security, more than 118,000 Cubans have presented themselves at ports of entry along the border since October 2012. During the 2016 budget year, which ended in September, a five-year high of more than 41,500 people came through the southern border.

In addition to the end of the “wet-foot/dry foot” policy, the Obama administration is also ending the Cuban Medical Professional Parole Program, which allows Cuban doctors who are sent abroad to work or study by their government to enter the United States. Obama’s statement said:

The United States and Cuba are working together to combat diseases that endanger the health and lives of our people.

By providing preferential treatment to Cuban medical personnel, the medical parole program contradicts those efforts, and risks harming the Cuban people. Cuban medical personnel will now be eligible to apply for asylum at U.S. embassies and consulates around the world, consistent with the procedures for all foreign nationals.

That decision was criticized by several Cuban-American members of Congress, including Senator Marco Rubio (R-Fla.), Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.), and Representative Mario Diaz-Balart (R-Fla.) who all released a statements opposing the move.

Ros-Lehtinen’s statement was the most strongly worded: “The repeal of the Cuban Medical Professional Parole Program was done because that’s what the Cuban dictatorship wanted and the White House



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caved to what Castro want[s].”

In his statement, Obama pursued his pro-immigration line, but did not address the historic reasons why Cuban refugees has been granted preferential treatment:

The United States, a land of immigrants, has been enriched by the contributions of Cuban-Americans for more than a century. Since I took office, we have put the Cuban-American community at the center of our policies. With this change we will continue to welcome Cubans as we welcome immigrants from other nations, consistent with our laws.

Why have Cubans historically been given preferential treatment? As noted above, the “wet-foot/dry foot” policy was a remnant of the Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966, which recognized the reality of life under the brutal communist Cuban dictatorship, and took into consideration Cuba’s proximity to the United States (just 90 miles from Key West, Florida.)

The president who signed the act, Lyndon Johnson, who had assumed office after the assassination of John F. Kennedy, had apparently inherited some of Kennedy’s wariness concerning the communist regime. On October 20, 1960, just weeks before his election to the presidency, then-senator Kennedy issued a statement on Cuba that was critical of his opponent’s, Vice President Richard Nixon’s, position toward the island nation. Castro had come to power while Nixon served under President Dwight D. Eisenhower. Several parts of that statement indicated that Kennedy was well aware of how the Eisenhower administration’s policies had enabled Castro’s take-over of Cuba. For example:

For 6 years before Castro came to power the Republicans did absolutely nothing to stop the rise of communism in Cuba. Our Ambassadors repeatedly warned the Republicans of mounting danger. But the warning was ignored, and communism grows in strength and influence....

Mr. Nixon saw nothing wrong in Cuba — he made no recommendations for action — he did not warn America that danger was growing — and as a result the Communists took over Cuba with virtually no opposition from the United States.

Now the Communists have been in power for 2 years. Yet we have done almost nothing to keep Castro from consolidating his regime and beginning subversive activities throughout Latin America.

Kennedy’s reference to our ambassadors’ warning about the danger of a communist takeover of Cuba was noted in [an article by John F. McManus](#), president emeritus of The John Birch Society posted by *The New American* last December. The article noted:

In the United States in May 1957, a pro-Communist named William Wieland won appointment as the head of the State Department’s Caribbean Desk. When U.S. Ambassador to Cuba Arthur Gardner warned his superiors (Wieland certainly included) that Castro was indeed a communist, he was speedily replaced and prevented from briefing his successor, Earl E.T. Smith....

In mid-1958, former Assistant Secretary of State Spruille Braden warned, “Rebel chief Fidel Castro is a pawn in the Kremlin’s international intrigue.” Over in Mexico, U.S. Ambassador Robert C. Hill sent a similar message to Washington.

As for those who pled ignorance of Castro’s communist background, the article continued:

Three months prior to Castro seizing control of Cuba, private citizen Robert Welch published the truth about the Cuban revolutionary in his small *American Opinion* magazine [the predecessor of *The New American*]. He stated in September 1958, “Now the evidence from Castro’s whole past that he is a Communist agent carrying out Communist orders and plans is overwhelming.” Welch



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would later found The John Birch Society.

The previously mentioned ambassador to Cuba, Arthur Gardner, who served from 1953 to 1957, and his successor, Earl T. Smith, who served from 1957 to 1959 (the unnamed ambassadors that Kennedy referred to in his 1960 statement) were cited in [another article](#) published by *The New American* last year. The article noted:

In testimony before the U.S. Senate Internal Security Subcommittee, Ambassador Gardner declared on August 27, 1960 that “U.S. Government agencies and the U.S. press played a major role in bringing Castro to power.” He also testified that Castro was receiving illegal arms shipments from the United States, about which our government was aware, while, at the same time, the U.S. government halted arms sales to Batista, even halting shipments of arms for which the Cuban government had already paid. Senator Thomas J. Dodd asked if Gardner believed that the U.S. State Department “was anxious to replace Batista with Castro,” to which he answered, “I think they were.”

Ambassador Earl T. Smith testified before the same committee on August 30, 1960. He declared in his testimony that, “Without the United States, Castro would not be in power today.”

The relevance to the U.S. policies that helped the communists gain control of Cuba to the decision to end the “wet-foot/dry foot” policy is this: Since the U.S. government was responsible for bringing a totalitarian regime to power in Cuba, it should recognize some moral responsibility for those fleeing from that regime and give favorable treatment. This was undoubtedly the reasoning behind Lyndon Johnson’s decision to sign the Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966. The AP offered a different explanation in its report on the ending of the policy: “The preferential treatment for Cubans reflected the political power of Cuban-Americans, especially in Florida, a critical state in presidential elections.” However, Florida had just 10 electoral votes back in 1966 (as opposed to 29 today) so that was not a very likely factor in passing the act back then.

The AP report theorizes that since the younger generation of Cuban-American voters is less likely than their parents or grandparents to vote Republican, Obama is no longer concerned about alienating them, and felt free to make his peace with the Cuban regime before leaving office.

In his statement, Obama wrote: “During my Administration, we worked to improve the lives of the Cuban people — inside of Cuba — by providing them with greater access to resources, information and connectivity to the wider world.”

However, that statement ignores the fact that the communists are still in charge in Cuba, and it is difficult to improve the lives of people who are basically living in a giant prison.

In response to the ending of the “wet-foot/dry foot” policy, a Cuban-born American named Frank De Varona, who spent years in Castro’s brutal gulags for joining with fellow freedom fighters to liberate Cuba in the Bay of Pigs invasion, sent a statement providing his reaction about Obama’s actions to *The New American’s* foreign correspondent, Alex Newman.

In his statement, De Varona wrote, in part:

These terrible concessions [ending the “Wet Foot/Dry Foot” policy and the Cuban Medical Professional Parole Program were] two gifts by Obama to the Cuban regime just when he had a week left of his disastrous and failed presidency. It represents two additional shameful unilateral concessions to the communist oppressive regime in exchange for NOTHING except increase



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repression against peaceful opponents of the tyrannical regime.

Cuban Americans from both parties in Congress denounced Obama's parting gifts to the Cuban brutal regime. In 2016 more than 54,000 Cubans arrived in the United States and were allowed to remain. Now any Cuban who enters the nation illegally will be deported.

Many who are sent back to Cuba may be incarcerated or treated badly. There are several thousands Cubans in Ecuador, Colombia, Panama, other Central Americans countries, and in Mexico who will not be allowed to enter America and they are desperate at the situation that they now find themselves.

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