



Closer Russian-Cuban Relations

OE Watch Commentary: A key tenet of current Russian foreign policy could be summed up as “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.” The Kremlin continues to strengthen ties with those countries which share an antagonism toward the US, for instance, Cuba. The accompanying excerpts, the first of which comes from the pro-Kremlin source, *Izvestiya*, describe the highlights of a recent Kremlin visit by the leader of Cuba, Miguel Diaz-Canel.

The first excerpt begins by referring to “the strategic, allied nature of relations between [Russia and Cuba] ... and the concurrence of positions on practically all relevant issues on the international agenda.” It describes their “mutually beneficial infrastructure projects and military-technical cooperation,” asserting that the “bilateral ties are literally permeated by the enduring historical bonds of friendship, mutual sympathy, respect, and solidarity.” The article focuses upon Russian initiatives to restore its economic ties to Cuba via “joint production of pharmaceuticals,” while “Russian energy companies are working effectively on the island” to “help support Havana’s energy independence and self-sufficiency in the face of the US embargo.” The article concludes by suggesting that Cuba may play a role in an era of “heightened re-militarization of international relations,” pointing out that “active preparation is underway for the deployment of a ground station of the Russian GLONASS [Global Navigation Satellite System]” in the country.

The second excerpt, from the Kremlin-supported *Sputnik*, announces that Russia plans “on giving Cuba a loan worth 38 million euros (\$43.25 million)” to purchase Russian military equipment. The final excerpt, from the official Russian news agency *Interfax*, quotes State Duma Defense Committee head Vladimir Shamanov, who suggests that “in response to the United States’ withdrawal from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty), ... a Russian military presence in Cuba could be an option.” During the Cold War, the USSR regarded Cuba as a close ally and used the island nation as a valuable pawn in its geostrategic struggle with the US. Recent events suggest that today’s Kremlin leadership maybe looking at adopting a similar Cuban strategy. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“It is too early to talk about Russia’s possible decisions in response to the United States’ withdrawal from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty), but a Russian military presence in Cuba could be an option....”

Source: Aleksandr Vedrussov, “Старый друг (Old Friend),” *Izvestiya*, November 2018. <https://iz.ru/808771/aleksandr-vedrussov/staryi-drug>

The first official visit outside of Latin America by Miguel Diaz-Canel, Chairman of the Council of State and Council of Ministers of Cuba, was not only symbolically significant but also pragmatically productive for both Havana and Moscow. Talks between the Russian and Cuban leadership not only took place in a friendly and businesslike atmosphere, but they confirmed the strategic, allied nature of relations between the countries and the concurrence of our positions on practically all relevant issues on the international agenda....

From mutually beneficial infrastructure projects and military-technical cooperation to such noncommercial gestures of goodwill as, for example, Russian assistance in restoring the golden surface of the dome of the Havana Capitol Building ahead of the 500th anniversary of the Cuban capital, our countries’ bilateral ties are literally permeated by the enduring historical bonds of friendship, mutual sympathy, respect, and solidarity....

...That is precisely why Russia is trying to participate in Cuba’s socioeconomic development projects into 2030 and beyond as actively as possible. Joint production of pharmaceuticals unmatched anywhere in the world has already been established, and Russian energy companies are working effectively on the island. Among other things, they help support Havana’s energy independence and self-sufficiency in the face of the US embargo....

Today, the strategic balance between great powers has again been upset. And once again, it is through no fault or initiative of our own. The announced withdrawal of Washington from the INF Treaty and the threat of the lapse of START-III will mean reevaluating fundamental agreements in the military sphere and a heightened re-militarization of international relations. Russia is absolutely opposed to the dismantling of the existing global security architecture but has already had to take into account its potential consequences in practice. Currently, active preparation is underway for the deployment of a ground station of the Russian GLONASS [Global Navigation Satellite System] in Cuba.

Source: “Russia May Lend \$43Mln to Cuba Under Defense Cooperation Program,” *Sputnik*, 2 November 2018. <https://sputniknews.com/military/201811021069466230-russia-cuba-defense-cooperation/>

Russia intends to sign an agreement in mid-November on giving Cuba a loan worth 38 million euros (\$43.25 million) as part of the two countries’ defense cooperation agenda, Russian Deputy Finance Minister Sergey Storchak told reporters...

Source: “Шаманов: Ответом на выход США из ДРСМД может быть военное присутствие России на Кубе (Shamanov: Russian military presence in Cuba may be possible response to U.S. quitting INF Treaty),” *Interfax*, 30 October 2018. <http://www.interfax-russia.ru/print.asp?id=979038&type=view>

It is too early to talk about Russia’s possible decisions in response to the United States’ withdrawal from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty), but a Russian military presence in Cuba could be an option, State Duma Defense Committee head Vladimir Shamanov told Interfax.

“We need at the minimum the Cuban government’s consent to build up our military presence in Cuba. After all, this issue is more political than military, and perhaps it’s too early today to talk about some specific measures in response to the U.S.’ possible withdrawal from the INF Treaty. An active phase of the assessment of the consequences is currently under way, and the assessment will be followed by proposals,” Shamanov said on Tuesday.

“I would not rule out that the matter could be addressed at the upcoming meeting with the Cuban leader in Moscow,” he said....