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News Reversing US-Cuba rapprochement would be harmful, Obama advisor warns

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In a conference call with journalists on Tuesday, Ben Rhodes, Obama's National Security Adviser, said that "there is uncertainty" about how Trump will handle politics with Cuba and warned of the consequences of reversing current policy.

Trump, who takes office on January 20, has vowed to "terminate" Obama's engagement with Cuba unless Havana gives the US what he calls a "better deal," including allowing broader political freedoms on the island. The Cuban government so far has refrained from commenting on Trump's statements.

Rhodes warned on Tuesday, however, that "turning back the clock" on the gains made on travel, exchanges, business and remittances "would go dramatically against the wishes of Cubans and Americans," as well as "against the interests" of the US.

As an example of the way forward, he noted that regulatory changes take a long time to develop and that all that time spent would be lost if the new government rolls back the policy.

"Regulatory changes, which took time, have given Cuban entrepreneurs capital," Rhodes said, adding that Americans have shown that they want to be able to

travel to Cuba - something which is the source of income for many Cubans.

"We are collaborating on a potential cancer vaccine," he said.

'Real progress has been made'

Addressing the expectations of Obama administration's regarding Trump's executive, Rhodes spoke cautiously, saying he "hoped" that Trump would understand that "this policy is better than the previous one of isolation."

"It did not work," Rhodes said.

Although he admitted "there is a lot of room for progress," Obama's advisor argued that in these two years "real progress has been made that has improved the lives of Cubans and the connection between the two peoples."

He noted, however, that within the Trump government, there are many business figures who have previously been in favor of opening up opportunities with Cuba, including the Chamber of Commerce.

Rhodes, who recently attended the remembrance services for the late Cuban leader Fidel Castro, also argued that "this is the worst possible moment" to close the island, as a moment of political "transition" is looming in Cuba.

Two-year anniversary

According to Trump's spokesman, the president-elect - who in the Republican primary elections showed a more open stance than his rivals toward Cuba - demanded that the island "release political prisoners, return fugitives from US justice, and also political and religious freedom for all Cubans living under oppression."

This coming Saturday, December 1, will mark two years since Obama and Castro announced the reestablishment of diplomatic relations broken in 1961.

US critics of Cuba engagement have accused Obama of making too many concessions. But despite restoration of relations, the Republican-controlled Congress has resisted lifting the broader US economic embargo.

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