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## The Triumph of the Cuban Position

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The ongoing negotiations between Cuba, the U.S., and an array of global institutions have faced remarkably few setbacks over the past six months. In fact, historic breakthroughs are becoming so commonplace as to seem almost ordinary. Just last week, concern that diplomatic snags would delay or derail the opening of U.S. and Cuban embassies subsided when [sources reported](#) that flags will be raised over both buildings this July.

Also last week, the Paris Club of creditor nations agreed to set Cuba's foreign obligations from a 1986 default at \$15 billion. It is a [favorable ruling for Cuba](#) that followed agreements with Japan, Mexico, Russia and China to the tune of 50-70 percent reductions on the island's foreign debt. The Paris Club agreement marks a crucial step by Cuban leaders to re-engage the global economy, and by international creditors to facilitate the process.

These developments, among others that have unfolded this year, raise some obvious questions: Why aren't advocates of the U.S. policy of isolation toward Cuba taking a harder line against the reset? Why aren't they denouncing the political and financial institutions supporting Cuba's regional and global integration? Given the breadth and intensity of political attacks on President Obama's foreign policy, why aren't Republican officials and presidential hopefuls doing more to undermine the new White House stance toward Cuba?

An important, if neglected, answer to these questions is that the Cold War positions that continue to inspire many activists and some elected officials on both sides of the aisle are increasingly out of date, out of step, and incompatible with the views of ordinary Cubans.

Since the 1959 Revolution, two competing perspectives have dominated policy discussions on Cuba in the U.S.: opposition to the Revolution and support for the trade embargo on the right, and support for the Revolution and opposition to the trade embargo on the left. Of course, both sides couched their arguments as advocacy for ordinary Cubans. Throughout a long and poisonous debate characterized by point-counterpoint accusations of "Communist," and "Fascist," North American partisans claimed to speak on behalf of Cubans who were powerfully constrained from speaking for themselves.

Yet despite the intensity and sincerity of feeling behind the right- and left-wing positions, it's not surprising that the views of U.S. activists and partisans did not map neatly onto the views of most Cubans. In fact, the dominant Cuban perspective, which I refer to it as the Cuban position, combines and rejects aspects of both the U.S. left- and right-wing positions.

The Cuban position has gained significant ground beyond the island and the White House. This September, [Pope Francis will visit Havana and Washington](#) in what may prove the most consequential event of the reconciliation process and the most forceful expression of Cuban views by a foreign leader on Cuban and U.S. soil.

As the first Latin American pontiff, Francis speaks with singular authority and gravity on the significance of U.S.-Cuban reconciliation. By organizing secret bilateral talks and setting the negotiating table at the Vatican in 2013, he demonstrated a willingness to intervene directly in the politics in one of the most historically fraught relationships in the Americas.

It is difficult to imagine a visit by Pope Francis to Cuba that does not involve a direct call for expanded fundamental rights. It is equally difficult to imagine a papal visit to Washington that does not involve a public appeal to scale back the embargo. Given the Vatican's stake in the negotiations and the rise of the Cuban position as the new default in U.S.-Cuban relations, it seems unlikely that the Pope intends to return to Rome empty handed.

Of course, calls on the island for the repeal of the embargo and reform of the Cuban system are not the only factors behind the advance of bilateral diplomacy and, eventually, trade. Support for the U.S. policy of isolation is shrinking among Cuban-Americans as first generation exiles die and the community diversifies. The anti-Castro right that cut its teeth during the Cold War has fewer members, resources, and influence than ever before. Support for normalized relations has become a majority position among Cuban-Americans (many of whom emigrated in the past several decades and espouse the Cuban position), not to mention the broader U.S. electorate, and Cold War-era policies aren't resonating two decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union. It goes without saying that the U.S. business community is especially interested in tapping Cuban markets.