

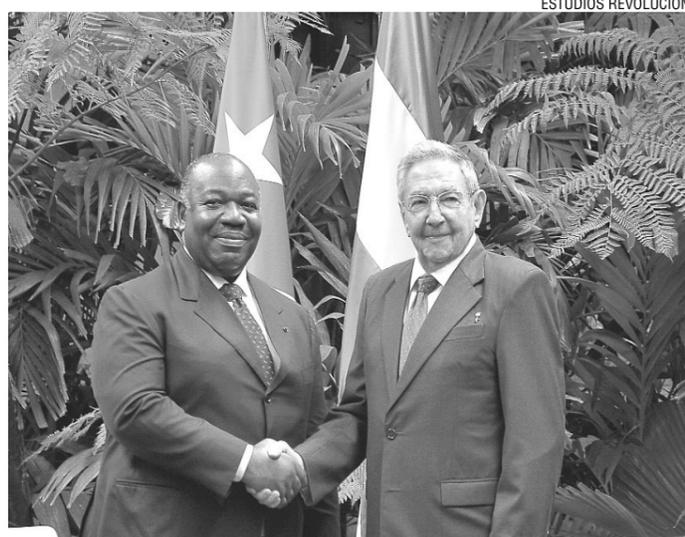
Raúl receives President of the Gabonese Republic

• ARMY General Raúl Castro Ruz, President of the Councils of State and Ministers of Cuba, received His Excellency Ali Bongo Ondimba, President of the Gabonese Republic, on July 7, during an official visit to the island.

In a friendly climate, the leaders noted the positive progress of bilateral relations and ratified their desire to expand and diversify existing cooperation between the two nations, especially in the areas of health and human resources training. They also discussed topics of interest on the international agenda.

The distinguished visitor was accompanied by Gabonese Minister of State and Foreign Affairs, Pacôme Moubelet-Boubeya, as well as other members of the official delegation.

Representing Cuba were Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla, and other officials.



Army General Raúl Castro Ruz, President of the Councils of State and Ministers of Cuba, officially welcomed the President of the Gabonese Republic, Ali Bongo Ondimba, on an official visit to the island.

OTHER ACTIVITIES ON THE ISLAND

Previous to his meeting with Raúl, President Ali Bongo Ondimba laid floral wreaths in the capital's Parque de los Próceres Africanos (African National

Heroes Park) and at the José Martí Memorial in the Plaza de la Revolución.

During the act honoring those who represented the ideals of African emancipation, the Gabonese President expressed his gratitude to the Cuban

people "not only for the interest shown in Africa and its history, but also for participating in our future. We honor great Africans of whom we are proud."

"This ceremony," he added, "has touched me; honor to the Cuban people

and government for recognizing that their population is of multiple origin and for paying tribute to the other continents."

In the context of the recently concluded 29th African Union (AU) Summit in Addis Ababa, the President of the West African nation warned that the AU is currently carrying out a major reform of its institutions in order to "guide our future."

"We have extensively discussed issues of peace, security and the fight against terrorism," he told Fernando González, president of the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples; Víctor Dreke, president of the Cuba-Africa Friendship Association; and other members of the African diplomatic corps accredited in Havana.

As part of his activities in Cuba, Ali Bongo also visited the headquarters of the Cuban Parliament, in Havana's Capitolio Nacional.

He was received by the President of the National Assembly of People's Power, Esteban Lazo Hernández, who explained the inner workings of this body, which currently sessions in Havana's International Conference Center.

Lazo recalled the historic ties between Cuba and Gabon, a country interested in intensifying trade and economic exchanges with the Caribbean island, according to its president.

This interest was expressed during a binational business forum held on July 7 with the presence of Rodrigo Malmierca, Cuban minister of Foreign Trade and Investment. (Minrex) •

After more than half a century... is the blockade being tightened?

On July 8 of 1963, 54 years ago, the Cuban Assets Control Regulations were approved, an essential component of the U.S. blockade of Cuba

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• OVER the last 54 years, through Democratic and Republican administrations alike, the economic, commercial, and financial blockade of Cuba has occupied a spot on the agenda of the U.S. President of the moment.

Even though it is common to think of the blockade as a single law, it is actually composed of a number of different pieces of legislation that regulate sanctions against Cuba.

In this sense, the U.S. Treasury Department's Cuban Assets Control Regulations are the most notable body of economic, commercial, and financial measures that sustain the blockade.

REGULATIONS TO CONTROL CUBAN ASSETS

These regulations stipulate the legal regime applicable to all commercial and financial transactions with Cuba, conducted by any U.S. citizen, permanent resident, or incorporated body established in the country.

They likewise allow for the freezing of Cuban assets in the United States, as well as the prohibition of Cuban exports to the country, and all financial and commercial transactions in U.S. dollars

by the Cuban government - unless approved under a specific license.

Also prohibited are transactions in U.S. dollars by any person or corporation in a third country with Cuban individuals or entities.

Since its imposition more than 50 years ago, the blockade has caused the Cuban people damage estimated at a value of 753,688,000,000 dollars, impacting health, education, sports, culture, and other strategic sectors key to the country's development.

THE BLOCKADE SINCE 12/17/14

On December 17, 2014, then President Barack Obama publicly acknowledged that his country's longstanding policy toward Cuba had failed. He subsequently implemented a series of executive decisions to modify certain aspects of the blockade, among them the Cuban Assets Control regulations.

In terms of travel, he authorized visits by U.S. citizens to Cuba under licenses in 12 accepted categories, including individual people-to-people travel, and allowed regular flights between the two countries to be established, although travel to the island for the purpose of tourism remained prohibited by law.

In the financial arena, use of the dollar was authorized for Cuba in

international transactions, although not a single transaction has yet taken place and financial persecution continues. U.S. banks were also allowed to provide credit to Cuban importers wishing to purchase authorized U.S. products.

Nonetheless, fear of facing sanctions on the part of financial institutions has made the impact of these changes practically null. Moreover, prohibitions have been maintained which prevent Cuban banks from opening corresponding accounts in the United States, which impedes the establishment of direct banking relations between the countries, making commercial operations more expensive.

Changes regarding commercial relations were limited to the telecommunications industry and the private sector in Cuba (the self-employed and cooperatives), consistent with the "soft power" approach of the Obama administration to promote subversion of the Cuban people and replace socialism.

Generally speaking, the measures adopted confirmed that the U.S. President could use his executive powers to substantially modify the implementation of the blockade, without involving Congress.

Nevertheless, the changes were insufficient and limited in scope, while the many important restrictions and

obstacles which remained in place hampered implementation, effectively blocking progress in the economic arena.

WHAT NOW WITH TRUMP'S ELECTION?

The election of Donald Trump as U.S. President has generated controversy and uncertainty worldwide.

The country's policy toward Cuba has not escaped this reality. This past June 16, Trump announced a change in policy for his administration, to be implemented over the next few months.

This preparatory period continues, but it can be expected that the new measures will contrast sharply with those previously approved by Obama. Implementation of the Cuban Assets Control Regulations may be notably reinforced, along with other Treasury Department restrictions.

In this context, changes could mean a step backward in the process of normalizing relations between Cuba and the United States, limiting travel by U.S. citizens to the island, as well as commercial and financial relations between companies in the two countries. •

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