

Bob Dole



NEWS

U.S. SENATOR FOR KANSAS

FROM:

SENATE MAJORITY LEADER

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CUBA POLICY

WASHINGTON -- Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole today issued the following statement:

Clearly nothing has changed in Cuba to warrant tougher treatment of freedom-seeking Cuban migrants. Castro has not altered his totalitarian control. Cuba is not more free. The Cuban people have no more political or economic freedom. Despite these facts, the administration has taken what amounts to a big step toward easing sanctions. Negotiations took place in secret with Cuba. Congress was not apprised of the negotiations with Cuba -- a state which provides haven for fugitives, and which the State Department characterizes as a sponsor of terrorism like Iran or Libya. I understand two State Department officials even resigned their positions today out of dismay with this abrupt change of policy.

I remember a lot of outcry when Haitians were interdicted at sea and returned to Haiti. A number of refugee advocates and human rights groups quickly condemned the same policy for Haitians in the past. I wonder if the same groups will have the same position now that it is Cubans being returned to Castro's Cuba. I expect the new policy toward Cuba will receive much scrutiny. I hope there will be hearings on all aspects of the policy. Many elements of the new policy raise troubling questions. For example, unless the administration thinks Castro has changed his nature, I have grave doubts that returned Cubans will be safe from reprisal. Can the United States even monitor reprisals in Castro's Cuba?

I do not recall a case where the United States involuntarily returned refugees to a Communist state. I do not think we would have forced people back over the Berlin Wall.

We all agree that South Florida cannot afford another massive exodus, but we cannot deny the fact that Castro is using the threat of a refugee crisis to change U.S. policy. Human blackmail is the utmost in cynicism. If the U.S. is going to use naval assets to prevent Cubans from reaching the United States, I would hope the President will consider an equivalent level of commitment to ending Castro's reign of terror. Specifically, I hope the administration will endorse tougher sanctions on Castro, and begin an international campaign to end his rule -- turning all of Cuba into a "safe haven." The administration needs to be just as engaged in ending Castro's rule as they are engaged in negotiating with his government. I hope today's agreement is not the first step on a road to normalization that many voices within the administration may favor.

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