

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 7, 2021

The Honorable Michael Pompeo
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

We write to express our deep concerns regarding reports that the Administration is considering designating Cuba a state sponsor of terrorism absent a formal review and consultation with Congress. In the final days of the Administration, efforts to politicize important decisions concerning our national security are unacceptable and threaten to damage future diplomatic efforts toward Cuba and set a harmful precedent for future designations.

After the United States resumed diplomatic relations with Cuba in 2015, Cuban entrepreneurs flourished thanks to the influx of American visitors, and access to mobile phones and the Internet increased dramatically, providing Cubans with information from outside the island never experienced since the 1959 Revolution. The Trump Administration has taken numerous steps to reverse that progress, and in so doing has deprived Americans of their right to travel freely, caused great harm to Cuban small businesses and American exporters, and denied Cuban-Americans the ability to provide financial support to their relatives in Cuba.

Since 2017, when the Administration resumed sanctions against Cuba, United States-Cuban cooperation on issues of mutual interest – from public health to maritime security – has ceased, the human rights situation in Cuba has gotten worse, and the Russian and Chinese presence in Cuba has increased. By any objective standard, the Trump Administration’s policy has failed to achieve its objectives.

Concerns about Cuba’s harboring of American fugitives and members of the Colombian ELN deserve serious and sustained attention, but nothing the Trump Administration has done in the past four years has made the slightest progress in resolving those issues and a last ditch, punitive listing of Cuba as a state sponsor of terrorism will only make such progress more elusive. Moreover, refusing to conduct a review to evaluate whether Cuba meets the objective criteria for designation as a state sponsor of terrorism would cheapen the significance of the designation, which triggers an immediate imposition of sanctions and currently applies to only three nations (North Korea, Iran, and Syria).

In light of the importance of this issue, we ask that you answer the following questions:

1. Is the Department considering designating Cuba a state sponsor of terrorism?
2. If so, is the State Department’s counterterrorism bureau – which ordinarily plays a central role in designating a nation as a state sponsor of terrorism – actively involved in the designation process? If not, why not?

