



Canadians love Cuba. We travel there in droves. We enjoy their beaches, their cigars and the historic sites and sounds of Havana. Some Canadians even revel in the lack of Americans at Cuban resorts, and laud our ability to travel to a beautiful part of the world sans our American neighbours. But things are changing, thanks in part to the Harper government. Earlier this year, Canadian diplomats facilitated high-level talks between the Obama administration and that of Cuban President Raul Castro. After these talks, Obama announced his intention to “normalize” relations between the U.S. and Cuba. Canadian leadership in contentious parts of the world is always welcome, but we should also be cautious of the Castro regime in Havana. There are at least three good reasons for skepticism over Cuba. **Political:** Cuba is run by a military dictatorship. It routinely arrests and detains Cuban nationals as “prisoners of conscience.” It’s the most repressive anti-democratic country in the Western Hemisphere. Unlike other despots around the world, the Castro brothers don’t even bother holding fake elections in Cuba. And to make matters worse, Raul Castro is trying to play Obama and Harper for fools. As part of the agreement to make peace with Cuba, Harper and Obama negotiated that Cuba release 53 political prisoners in exchange for three Cuban spies jailed in the U.S. The spies were released, but Cuba reneged on its end of the deal. When the names of the prisoners were made public, we learned that a dozen of them had been released before the agreement. One man was released in October and then re-arrested in December just so he could be released again as part of the prisoner swap. Reports from within Cuba show that 200 more political prisoners have been arrested since the swap. **Economic:** In his last international appearance as Canada’s foreign affairs minister, John Baird travelled to Boston to applaud America’s change of heart towards Cuba. Baird said he believes, “the more Americans — American values, American capitalism — that permeate Cuba, the freer the Cuban people will be.” This is generally true. Economic growth and freedoms tend to lead to more democratic and political rights. But we shouldn’t assume that more tourists will automatically result in more money for everyday Cubans. That’s because Cuba’s military literally owns and controls the tourism industry. Not the government that funds health care and education. The Cuban military. One military-run company, Gaviota, owns a third of all hotels in Cuba and hosted half of all Canadian visitors last year. Gaviota’s parent company, Gaesa, controls currency exchange and foreign transactions. When a tourist spends Canadian or American money in Cuba, they’re helping fund the Cuban military. One million Canadians travel to Cuba each year, and yet the average Cuban is 30% poorer than they were in 1990s. Next time your neighbour brags about a trip to Cayo Coco, you can remind them that their hotel bill likely paid for Cuban military guns; meanwhile, the housekeeper who made the beds and cleaned the rooms takes home less than \$20 per month. **Security:** A major sticking point for Obama lifting the embargo against Cuba is addressing U.S. national security concerns. Obama has ordered the U.S. State Department to undergo a six-month review of Cuba’s placement on



the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism. Obama cannot move forward with trade deals if the U.S. believes the Cuban government is aiding terrorists, as its current policy suggests. Cuba was placed on this list in 1982 because it actively trained and armed rebel groups in Africa, Latin America and Spain. For example, Cuba was instrumental in arming the FARC, a Marxist guerrilla insurgency and drug cartel that terrorized Colombia for decades. Over the last 30 years, Cuba still holds shady ties. Cuba supports Iran's nuclear program. It has undermined UN nuclear inspectors and ignored sanctions by supporting Iran through banking agreements. Cuba also helps orchestrate an immigration fraud network that has smuggled radical Islamists into North America, as demonstrated in the Center for a Secure Free Society's "Canada on Guard" report. In 2013, a North Korean ship carrying undeclared Cuban weapons was seized in the Panama Canal, violating a UN weapons treaty. Cuba claimed it was sending weapons to North Korea for repairs. A hard sell, given that the bombs were hidden underneath sacks of sugar. Bombs hiding under sacks of sugar. How fitting. We should beware of Trojans bearing gifts, and remember some of the more troubling truths about Castro's Cuba.