



CUBA

U.S.-Cuba commission meets for first time during Trump administration

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The United States and Cuba held their sixth Bilateral Commission meeting — the first since President Donald Trump has been in office — and it wasn't exactly cordial.

In a statement following Tuesday's meeting, the Cuban delegation said it protested “the disrespectful, unacceptable and meddling statements made by President Donald Trump in his address to the U.N. General Assembly” at the same time the two sides were meeting in Washington.

The Cuban delegation — led by Josefina Vidal, Cuba's chief negotiator during the opening toward Cuba under former President Barack Obama — noted the commission was meeting against the backdrop of a “reversal” in Cuba-U.S. relations. On June 16, Trump announced a new Cuba policy that will make it more difficult for Americans to travel to the island and limit U.S. commercial dealings with Cuba.

The Cuban side said it “placed on record its rejection of measures designed to intensify the U.S. blockade [its term for the embargo] and to interfere with Cuban internal affairs.” It also objected to “the use of confrontational rhetoric and the political manipulation of the human rights issue as a pretext to justify U.S. policies.”

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Cuba also addressed a series of mysterious incidents that have harmed the health of U.S. diplomats and their families in Havana — in some cases causing permanent hearing loss or concussions. Some investigators have talked of a possible “sonic attack.”

“Cuba has never perpetrated nor will it ever perpetrate actions of this nature, and has never permitted nor will it ever permit any third-party use of its territory for this purpose,” the Cuban statement said. It also noted that Cuban authorities have a “keen interest” in clarifying what happened to the diplomats.

The commission was set up during the Obama administration to discuss areas of mutual interest between the two countries, and had met five times since the United States and Cuba re-established diplomatic relations in July 2015.

By contrast, the previous meeting, last Dec. 7, was a comparative love fest with the sides noting achievements in U.S.-Cuba relations, including signing 11 non-binding agreements on health, the environment, counter-narcotics, and other areas of cooperation.
