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Author's Response by **Hideaki Kami**, Kanagawa University, Yokohama

I appreciate William LeoGrande's review of my *Journal of Cold War Studies* article, "The Limits of Dialogue: Washington, Havana, and Miami, 1977-1980," on the U.S.-Cuban talks and the origins of the Mariel boatlift.¹ The topic of U.S.-Cuban relations has been underexplored for too many years due to the difficulty of gaining access to Cuban and Miami Cuban sources. Even some crucially important U.S. records on the secret U.S.-Cuban conversations during the Carter years, such as the Policy Review Committee (PRC) meeting records and the memorandum of Atlanta talks, opened just a few years ago. The article points to new interpretations regarding the triangular Washington-Havana-Miami relationship during the late 1970s, but has no intention of undervaluing any previous scholarship, including LeoGrande's highly-regarded work on the U.S. attempt at dialogue with Cuba.² The discussion merely underscores that different perspectives lead to different conclusions.

There is one area where LeoGrande and I agree: that the broader context around the U.S.-Cuban dialogue matters. Those who are interested in my interpretation of the broader narrative of U.S. relations with Cuba will find much more in my recent book, *Diplomacy Meets Migration*.³ It includes more of Havana and Miami's views, based on my analysis of U.S., Cuban, and Miami Cuban archival sources. Although the article under review principally focuses on the *origins* of the Mariel boatlift, the book discusses the boatlift itself, the subsequent rise of the Miami Cuban lobbies, and many more topics like U.S. "democracy" promotion in Cuba and Havana's countermeasures against the lobbies. The book explores how the Mariel boatlift helped to

¹ PDF version: <https://issforum.org/reviews/PDF/AR829.pdf>, published 8 February 2019.

² William M. LeoGrande and Peter Kornbluh, *Back Channel to Cuba: The Hidden History of Negotiations between Washington and Havana* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

³ Hideaki Kami, *Diplomacy Meets Migration: US Relations with Cuba during the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

transform Miami politics and U.S. foreign policy toward Cuba, which in turn influenced Cuban policy toward the United States.

Although I agree with LeoGrande in terms of the importance of context, I disagree with him in other areas, especially his interpretation of the article's purpose. By focusing on the triangular Washington-Havana-Miami dialogue during the late 1970s, the article aims to bring migration into the scope of our analysis and to question how Washington defined the 'dialogue' of that era. The U.S. government assumed that Washington alone could determine the scope, agenda, and pace of the dialogue. Regardless of what Cubans in Havana or even Miami desired, Washington could begin, halt, or end the dialogue whenever it pleased. The article's central message is that this assumption that Washington could unilaterally define the scope and pace of the U.S.-Cuban dialogue was the principal reason why Washington failed to anticipate and prevent the 1980 Mariel crisis.

The article determines that National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski was the driver behind this Washington-centric view. Since the pivotal August 1977 PRC meeting, Brzezinski claimed that Cuba was important mainly because of its interventions in Africa, rendering all other issues such as human rights, economic interests, and broader Latin American opinion important, but essentially insignificant. To Havana, however, this mindset was paternalistic at best and imperialistic at worst. Cuba came to the table with different assumptions. As Fidel Castro said at one point, Washington, not Havana, belatedly connected the dialogue with Africa. Washington's argument that Havana should withdraw its troops from Africa so that the dialogue would proceed was wholly unacceptable to the Cuban leader.

To Brzezinski the dialogue had ended when Castro refused to concede over Africa. LeoGrande's review echoes this point of view. But the article emphasizes that even inside Washington, many Carter officials contested Brzezinski's Africa-centric approach, believing that U.S. policy toward Cuba should address issues of human rights, emigration, and more. Carter sided with Brzezinski because he himself was uneasy about Cuban behavior in Africa. Yet, at Secretary of State Cyrus Vance's urging, Carter contradicted himself by re-opening the dialogue with Cuba to solve human rights issues. Brzezinski was skeptical, and thus tried to undermine the talks by arguing that African disputes should be discussed. Carter once again accepted his point, but Vance continued to support future talks. Carter was never firm in his opposition to the re-opening of the dialogue, sending his emissaries just after the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan.

This complexity of U.S. diplomacy should not be dismissed. With Carter's ambiguous attitude in mind, Castro initiated another 'dialogue' with the Cuban community abroad. The article reveals that at the start of his presidency Carter himself had tried to involve the community in the U.S.-Cuban dialogue in his efforts to address human rights issues. Otherwise, the Cuban leader would not have brought up these matters repeatedly during the secret U.S.-Cuban talks. In Havana's view, excluding or downplaying the humanitarian issues in the U.S.-Cuban dialogue was ridiculous, regardless how important Africa might have been. That would automatically undervalue the concession that Havana had already made in this field. The empirical record, including the interview transcripts with the then chief Cuban negotiator José Luis Padrón, reinforce these points.⁴

⁴ This argument also found support in the Cuban literature, esp. Elier Ramírez Cañedo and Esteban Morales Domínguez, *De la confrontación a los intentos de "normalización": La política de los Estados Unidos hacia Cuba* (Havana:

By imposing its own definition on the dialogue, Washington was content that it could focus on Cold War geopolitics alone. By doing so, however, Washington failed to fully grasp the meaning of Havana's repeated warnings over the shifting dynamics of Cuban and Cuban American politics on the ground and their growing implication for Cuban and U.S. diplomacy. Castro's patience finally wore out in April 1980, when, in the midst of the Peruvian embassy crisis that preceded the boatlift, he concluded that the U.S. president was hopelessly opportunistic. Castro decided that he could no longer trust Carter as a dialogue partner, even if the latter were to win a second term. He perceived that Washington's inability to respond to his pleas was another cheap, but politically-motivated, provocation. The Cuban leader agreed on the suspension of the Mariel boatlift, and therefore the resumption of the dialogue, only after the U.S. president signaled a meaningful change in his approach.⁵

The tension between these interpretations may be reflective of a deeper schism between traditional diplomatic history and "new" diplomatic history. Traditionally, diplomatic historians focus on state-to-state diplomacy and assess Washington's approach for immediate or future policy discussions. Now with more access to non-U.S. and non-governmental records, more diplomatic historians, whether based in the United States or abroad, go beyond Washington's official line and explore what was really going on outside Washington. Even during the Cold War, Cubans of all political stripes, of all socioeconomic status, and of all cultural and ideological backgrounds, pursued what they believed was the best policy for themselves, which often did not align with what Washington thought would be in the best interests of the U.S. government. In other words, what was important to Washington was not always important to those who were most affected.

This discrepancy may not matter in all international affairs scholarship, but it very much did so in the months before the Mariel boatlift. That is the article's most important message. In its conclusion, I wrote: "The growing discrepancy, conflicts, and contradictions between U.S. foreign policy and Cuban and Cuban-American politics culminated in a migration crisis that Washington failed to anticipate, prevent, or control" (41).

Once again, I reiterate my gratitude to William LeoGrande for taking time to write his review and allowing me to reflect on my argument. Despite our differences over the approach, interpretations, and even the purpose of my research as discussed above, I of course have great respect for his work on U.S. policy toward Cuba, Cuban politics, and Latin American affairs.

Hideaki Kami is an associate professor at the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Kanagawa University, Yokohama. He is the author of *Diplomacy Meets Migration: US Relations with Cuba during the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018). He is currently working on Cuban relations with the United States

Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2014). Ramírez Cañedo and this author collaborated in interviewing Padrón and shared other interview records, as well as recently declassified U.S. records.

⁵ Because of Carter's shift of attitude at the end of the Mariel boatlift, Padrón recalled, he renewed his hope that the two nations could reach some understanding on their relations, pursue mutual interests, and coexist—if Carter was reelected. See Kami, *Diplomacy Meets Migration*, chap. 4.

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around the end of the Cold War, with a special focus on migration, diplomacy, and the interaction between the two.

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