Secretary of State John Kerry meets with the U.S. Embassy's children during his August visit.
State Department photos

Havana would re-establish relations, however, doors have begun to open. As part of a series of changes agreed to by both governments, diplomats are no longer required to request permission to leave the capitals, permitting freer reporting and easier interactions with citizens.

WARS HAVE BEEN FOUGHT AND WOUNDS HEALED. YET, IT HAS TAKEN "A COURAGEOUS DECISION" BY THE UNITED STATES AND CUBA TO "STOP BEING THE PRISONERS OF HISTORY AND TO FOCUS ON THE OPPORTUNITIES OF TODAY AND TOMORROW,"
– SECRETARY KERRY

The Cuban government also lifted a cap on the number of diplomats allowed to serve at Embassy Havana, a shift expected to produce a gradual increase in the size of the mission. A total of 350 people serve there now, including more than 50 full-time Americans.

For diplomats serving in Cuba, the greatest opportunity may be a new openness evident among Cuban officials. Officers across Embassy Havana sections have noted an increased willingness among Cuban counterparts to work together. In July, for example, Cuba's Foreign Ministry helped the embassy's public affairs section arrange for officials to participate in the International Visitors Leadership Program, a first for the Cuban government. The public affairs section has also worked with the Cuban Ministry of Education to develop a program supporting English-language teaching and recently facilitated the first TOEFL test offered in Cuba.

"Government of Cuba ministries have become more accessible," said Lydia Barraza, the embassy's deputy public affairs officer. "The Cuban government and Cuban institutions are seeing the benefits of engagement."

The consular section also seized on the political shift. Before July 20, Cuban officials handled the intake of all Cuban visa applicants, taking their personal information and organizing groups to enter the consular section.