

# *U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry Leaves Havana, Returns to Washington*

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Havana, August 15 (RHC) -- U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry returned home Friday afternoon after a long and busy day in Cuba, where he presided over a flag-raising ceremony at the newly re-opened U.S. embassy.

Kerry was on Cuban soil for about 11 hours, in what became the first visit in 70 years by a U.S. secretary of state. The last one to visit the island was Edward Stettinius, in March 1945.

The senior official attended the hoisting of the flag in Havana after months of bilateral talks which started on December 17, when Presidents Raul Castro and Barack Obama announced the will to move towards normalization of relations between the neighboring countries.

During a news conference with Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez, Kerry said he did not believe that the next president of the United States would "throw it all away," referring to efforts to normalize relations with Cuba.

He reiterated that the road to full normalization of bilateral ties will not be easy because "there will be small obstacles, differences..."

Kerry and Rodriguez announced the forthcoming establishment of a bilateral commission to address outstanding issues, among which would be the economic, commercial and financial blockade the United States has imposed on Cuba for more than half a century.

In addition to his official agenda in Cuba, Kerry toured in the afternoon, in shirtsleeves and no tie, several places in Old Havana, a revamped area with almost five centuries of history, declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO.

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