

Readings for June 21 Discussion on "Cuba After Castro: What's next?"

Economist - Mar. 24, 2012 - Special Report on Cuba

This is the introduction to a long special report on Cuba. WOK

WHEN ON JULY 31st 2006 Cuban state television broadcast a terse statement from Fidel Castro to say that he had to undergo emergency surgery and was temporarily handing over to his brother, Raúl (pictured with Fidel, left), it felt like the end of an era. The man who had dominated every aspect of life on the island for almost half a century seemed to be on his way out. In the event Fidel survived, and nothing appeared to change. Even so, that July evening marked the start of a slow but irreversible dismantling of communism (officially, "socialism") in one of the tiny handful of countries in which it survived into the 21st century.

Raúl Castro, who formally took over as Cuba's president in February 2008 and as first secretary of the Communist Party in April 2011, is trying to revive the island's moribund economy by transferring a substantial chunk of it from state to private hands, with profound social and political implications. He has abolished a few of the many petty restrictions that pervade Cubans' lives. He has also freed around 130 political prisoners. His government has signed the UN covenants on human rights, something his brother had jibbed at for three decades. Repression has become less brutal, though two prisoners have died on hunger strikes. Cubans grumble far more openly than they used to, and academic debate has become a bit freer. But calls for democracy and free elections are still silenced. The Communist Party remains the only legal political party in Cuba. And Raúl Castro has repeatedly dashed the hopes of many Cubans that the hated exit visa, which makes it hard (and for some, impossible) to leave the country, will be scrapped.

In this special report

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The economic reforms, set out in 313 "guidelines" approved by a Communist Party congress in April 2011, are being implemented slowly and with great caution. That is because they face stubborn resistance from within the party and the bureaucracy. Indeed, the leadership shuns the word "reform", let alone "transition". Those terms are contaminated by the collapse of the Soviet Union, an event that still traumatises Cuba's leaders. Officially, the changes are described as an "updating" in which "non-state actors" and "co-operatives" will be promoted. But whatever the language, this means an emerging private sector.

<http://www.economist.com/node/21550418>

The Havana Note

Here is the web page for writings by our Resource Person, Dr. Arturo Lopez-Levy. Printed are two sample entries. WOK

<http://thehavananote.com/contributors/18/all>

All Posts by Arturo Lopez-Levy

[What lies across the Water- Why History, International Law and American Values matter in the case of the Cuban five](#)

Arturo Lopez-Levy — Apr 23, 2012

The following text is my presentation at the panel organized by Wayne Smith about the book "What lies across the Water", at the Center for International Policy, April 18, Washington DC.

I want to thank [Dr. Wayne Smith](#) and the [Center for International Policy](#) (CIP) for the invitation to discuss the book "[What lies across the Water](#)". As a Cuban-American who thinks constantly about the difficult relations between Cuba and the United States, it is an honor to be part of the effort of the CIP to improve the knowledge about the complex history of these links and the need to approach them with creativity and goodwill.

Whatever you might think about [the Cuban Five](#), if you want to know how their case fits into the history of relations between Cuba and the United States, you must read this book. The author [Stephen Kimber](#) presents a well written short narrative about how the Cuban five ended up in US prisons. The book reads more as reportage for the general public than as an academic report. The author has studied the long history of conflict between Cuba and the United States and the use of terror as a political weapon by Cuban right wing groups in Florida.

1 [Read more](#) [2 Comments](#)



[Cuba and the Inter-American system: A smoldering "fire"](#)

Early in March, Colombian President [Juan Manuel Santos](#) traveled to Cuba to tell Raul Castro that he could not invite him to the [VI Summit of the Americas](#) in Cartagena de Indias due to a lack of hemispheric consensus. Once back in Bogota, Mr. Santos said that Colombia had "put out a fire" and pledged to discuss Cuba's participation in the inter-American system at the summit in order to prevent this issue from flaring up again before the next presidential conference scheduled for 2015 in Panama.

The Colombian decision triggered reactions from both Cuba and the US. It's hard to say whose discourse was more anachronistic. The statements made by Cuba's Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez read as an impassioned harangue to the revolutionary Tricontinental of 1966. Hillary Clinton's responses to Ileana Ros-Lehtinen before the House Foreign Affairs Committee appeared to be addressing a rest home for Cuban-Americans who landed in Miami in 1962. Instead of adopting a conflict resolution approach, Cuba and the US traveled back to the Cold War, to a multilateral inter-American system

that no longer exists. With one swipe, they erased five decades of changes in the hemispheric balance of power and the adoption of standards such as ideological pluralism, non-intervention and democratic governance.

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Cuba and the United States of America have had an interest in one another since well before either of their independence movements. Plans for purchase of [Cuba](#) from the [Spanish Empire](#) were put forward at various times by the [United States](#). As the Spanish influence waned in the [Caribbean](#), the United States gradually gained a position of economic and political dominance over the island, with the vast majority of [foreign investment](#) holdings and the bulk of imports and exports in its hands, and a strong influence on Cuban political affairs.

Following the [Cuban Revolution](#) of 1959, relations deteriorated substantially and have been marked by tension and confrontation since. The United States does not have formal [diplomatic relations](#) with Cuba and has maintained an [embargo](#) which makes it illegal for U.S. corporations to do business with Cuba. U.S. diplomatic representation in Cuba is handled by the [United States Interests Section in Havana](#) and there is a similar [Cuban Interests Section](#) in [Washington D.C](#); both are officially part of the respective embassies of Switzerland. The United States imposed the embargo because of the [nationalization](#) of US corporations' property during the Revolution, and has stated it will continue it so long as the Cuban government continues to refuse to move toward democratization and greater respect for [human rights](#),^[1] hoping to see democratization and a reintroduction of [capitalism](#) of the type that took place in Eastern Europe after the [revolutions of 1989](#).

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuba-United_States_relations

[Interview](#) - Council on Foreign Relations The Frozen U.S.-Cuba Relationship

Interviewee: [Julia E. Sweig](#), Nelson and David Rockefeller Senior Fellow for Latin America Studies and Director for Latin America Studies, Council on Foreign Relations

Interviewer: [Brianna Lee](#), Production Editor, CFR.org

February 28, 2012

Fifty years after the United States enacted an embargo on all trade and commercial transactions with Cuba, relations between the two countries remain at a standstill. [Julia E. Sweig](#), CFR's director of Latin American studies, says the Obama administration has prioritized domestic politics over foreign policy in its relationship with Cuba, even as Cuban President Raul Castro has been "moving in the direction of the kind of reforms that every administration over the last fifty years has called upon Cuba to make." The case of American USAID contractor Alan Gross, currently serving a [fifteen-year prison sentence in Cuba \(CubanTriangle\)](#) on charges of attempting to upend the regime through a U.S.-authorized democracy promotion program, has also heightened tensions, she says. Meanwhile, Sweig adds, Cuba is strengthening ties with global powers like Brazil, as well as the Catholic Church, as the Castro administration seeks to open up new economic and social spaces for its citizens.

We've passed the fifty-year mark of the breakdown of diplomatic ties between Cuba and the United States. Where do we stand now? Is normalizing relations even remotely on the table on either side? Let me start by talking about three geographical points on the map that are relevant to the answer. In Washington, the Obama administration, consistent with the approach of the Bush administration, has made a political decision to subordinate foreign policy and national interest-based decisions to domestic politics with respect to its Cuba policy. There is a bipartisan group of members of Congress--Democrats and Republicans, House and Senate--who represent Florida, a state where there are many swing votes that deliver the electoral votes for any president. Those individuals not only deliver votes, but they deliver campaign finance, and generally make a lot of noise, and that combination has persuaded the White House that reelection is more of a priority than taking on the heavy lifting to set the United States on the path of normalization with Cuba for now.

"Brazil is clearly stepping into a space where the United States should be, and the United States has made a decision to watch as that happens."

The second point is what's happening in Cuba. It's not realistic to expect the United States to undertake a series of unilateral moves toward normalization; it needs a willing partner. I believe we have one in Havana but have failed to read the signals. Raul Castro has now been in office since the beginning of 2008. Raul holds the reins on both foreign policy and domestic policy, and, domestically, the politics of implementing a fairly wide range of economic and political and social reforms are his priority. In a deal that was coordinated with the help of the Cuban Catholic Church and Spain, he released all of the political prisoners in Cuba. He also is taking a number of steps that imply a major rewriting of the social contract in Cuba to shrink the size of the state and give Cuban individuals more freedom--economically, especially, but also in terms of speech--than we've seen in the last fifty years. He has privatized the residential real estate and car market[s], expanded much-needed agrarian reform, lifted caps on salaries, and greatly expanded space for small businesses. He also is moving to deal with corruption and to prepare the groundwork for a great deal more foreign investment. He's moving in the direction of the kind of reforms that every administration over the last fifty years has called upon Cuba to make, albeit under the rubric of a one-party system. There's a broad range of cooperation--neighborhood security in the Gulf of Mexico, as Cuba has just started drilling for oil, counternarcotics, and natural disasters--between the two countries that is still not happening, and that gives me the impression that the United States has been unwilling to take "yes" for an answer and respond positively to steps taken by Cuba.

The third geographic part of the story is south Florida. When they're polled, the majority of Cuban-Americans say that the embargo has failed, and support lifting the travel ban or loosening the embargo or some steps along that continuum of liberalization and normalization. The one most significant step that Obama did take when he took office was to eliminate the restriction on Cuban-American travel and remittances to Cuba. Cuban-Americans are now voting with their feet. If you go to the Miami airport, you will see thirty, forty flights to Cuba a week just out of Miami. Cuban-Americans are now investing in their families' small businesses on the island. The politics of this are strange because we are told by the Obama administration that we can't rock the boat of the Cuban-American vote, but those very voters are in fact demonstrating that they support a radically different set of policies than, in fact, the Obama administration has supported.

The ongoing case of [USAID contractor Alan Gross \(AP\)](#) has stoked tensions between the United States and Cuba. At the heart of the matter is the U.S. democracy promotion program that authorized Gross' travel to Cuba. What impact does this case have on U.S.-Cuba relations? Precisely because we have no overarching framework for diplomacy in place and no political will to establish it for now, the Alan Gross case casts a huge shadow over U.S.-Cuban relations. The heart of the issue is the context in which those [pro-democracy] programs were being implemented. We have a full-blown economic embargo with extra-territorial dimensions that are felt in the banking and finance world--a very comprehensive and well-enforced sanctions program. The democracy programs sound very mom and apple pie--USAID has them around the world, its officials will tell you. But having them in Cuba is an [extraordinary provocation](#). They were inherited from the previous administration's concept of regime change, and under Obama, they remain largely intact. The [programs are purposely kept secret](#) from the American public. There is no public information about the private and not-for-profit subcontractors in the United States and around the world, and Cuban institutions and individuals who may be targets of the programs are likewise not told they are part of such U.S. government programs. The democracy promotion programs have been deliberately politicized in order to provoke, and they have succeeded in provoking.

What's key is the context. There's been no real diplomacy; there's no negotiating framework that I've seen for a very long period of time, and again, that has to do with domestic politics. It's very hard to understand otherwise why this guy's still in jail. The United States has repeatedly asked the Cuban government to release Gross unilaterally, with no commitments on our end. Asking for unilateral gestures, having rebuffed or ignored or failed to read the signals from Cuba, has created this impasse. Having said that, there can be a diplomatic, humanitarian solution, and I see no value to keeping Gross in jail and hope he will be released as soon as possible. But we will need real diplomacy and a framework for negotiating a range of issues both countries care about.

Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff paid a visit to Cuba recently, and it looks like Cuba's trying to formulate ties with an influential, rising Latin American power. How does this burgeoning relationship between Cuba and Brazil affect Cuba's relationship with the United States.? Brazil is a regional power and a global power; it plays in a number of spaces well beyond Latin America. In the last couple of years it undertook some major investments, and those investments will grow in Cuba--in infrastructure, in agriculture, in perhaps energy as well, and others. Brazil is clearly stepping into a space where the United States should be, and the United States has made a decision to watch as that happens.

How does Cuba's human rights situation complicate the relationship between those two countries? It doesn't seem to be complicating it at all. Rousseff--given her own history of having spent three years in jail and being tortured in the 1970s and having worked to make human rights more of a domestic and foreign policy--her presidency has quite a bit of standing with respect to talking to any government, including the Cuban government, about human rights. She was criticized by her own public, especially in the media, a great deal for choosing to have those discussions with Cuba privately. But I would suggest that having a public, browbeating, rhetorical approach has almost always backfired for major heads of state when dealing with Cuba, and if you look at the success that the Catholic Church and the Spanish government had around

the political prisoner release, that success derived from a basic fundamental degree of respect, cooperation, and engagement as the framework for the relationship.

<http://www.cfr.org/cuba/frozen-us-cuba-relationship/p27510>