

# Easing the 50-year tension between the U.S. and Cuba

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Students and teachers celebrate after listening to a live, nationally broadcast speech by Cuban President Raul Castro about the country's restoration of relations with the United States, at a school in Havana, Cuba, Wednesday, Dec. 17, 2014. AP Photo/Ramon Espinosa

Cuba and the United States have had a tension-filled past. The United States cut its relations with Cuba in 1961, two years after communist leader Fidel Castro seized power. Cuba is an island nation less than 100 miles off the coast of Florida.

In the 1960s, the U.S. government was worried about communism spreading to the United States. Under communism, the government owns all the property and people have few freedoms.

Now, the United States and Cuba will begin talks to create diplomatic communication and open embassies in each other's countries. The discussions could be the first step in repairing a 50-year standoff between the two nations.

## **An American Comes Home**

The news comes after the release of American Alan Gross, who was convicted of illegally bringing communications equipment into Cuba. He had been jailed in Cuba for five years.

Cuba has already freed Gross and sent him home to the United States. Gross is 65 years old and in poor health. Secret talks over freeing him went on for more than a year.

In exchange for Gross, the United States will release three Cubans convicted of spying on anti-Castro groups in Florida. Florida is home to many Cuban refugees who are passionately against Castro.

Gross was convicted in 2011 of illegally bringing satellite phones and computer equipment to the Jewish community in Cuba. Cuba sentenced him to 15 years in jail.

His family in Maryland has described Gross as weak and barely able to walk. He had refused medical care, food and visits from U.S. officials in Cuba to protest his imprisonment.

### **Trade Ban, For Better Or Worse**

The Obama administration now plans to open talks on other issues that divide the two nations, including the economic trade ban. Under the trade ban, or embargo, American companies have been forbidden to do business with Cuba and export most U.S. products there. Travel to Cuba was also limited. Congress passed the embargo to pressure Cuba to be more democratic.

"Opening the door with Cuba for trade, travel and the exchange of ideas will create a force for positive change," said Democratic Senator Dick Durbin of Illinois. The 50-year policy of ignoring Cuba achieved nothing, Durbin said.

Legally, only Congress can lift the trade ban. However, President Barack Obama does not have to seek approval from Congress to normalize ties with Cuba. The president can change the diplomatic and economic relationships with other countries through his executive powers. However, anti-Castro activists, including Florida's congressional delegation, are likely to oppose it.

Experts thought that Obama would make a major move on restoring relations with Cuba. They expected it would come between the U.S. mid-term elections in November and next spring's Summit of the Americas. The meeting is between the heads of countries in North and South America to discuss issues they all have in common. Latin American countries insisted that Cuba be invited to the meeting. Obama will be forced to deal with Raul Castro. He is Fidel Castro's brother, who became president after Fidel was too sick to rule.

### **It Might Not Be A Popular Move**

Some people say that chances that Obama would lose popularity over the matter have decreased. The Cuban-American immigrant community has become less outspoken. Also, evidence is adding up that the trade ban did not achieve its goal of loosening the Communist grip on the country.

"No senior administration official believes the embargo will foster democratic change," said Gregory B. Craig. The former White House lawyer spoke at a conference on Cuba at New York's Columbia University. "U.S. politicians can support change in Cuba policy without great political risk."

The three Cuban intelligence agents released from U.S. prisons were among five Cuban agents arrested by the FBI in 1998. They were convicted three years later on charges of acting as illegal foreign agents and conspiring to obtain military secrets from U.S. Army headquarters in Miami.

Two of the five have served their sentences and returned home. In Cuba, the Cuban Five are hailed as heroes and "freedom fighters" unfairly imprisoned by the United States.

Havana has not yet released a public statement. Raul Castro is to speak about U.S.-Cuban relations, a Cuban official said.

**Quiz**

- 1 Which of the following sentences is a personal opinion or judgment that would NOT belong in a summary of the article?
- (A) "Opening the door with Cuba for trade, travel and the exchange of ideas will create a force for positive change," said Democratic Senator Dick Durbin of Illinois.
  - (B) However, anti-Castro activists, including Florida's congressional delegation, are likely to oppose it.
  - (C) Experts thought that Obama would make a major move on restoring relations with Cuba.
  - (D) Also, evidence is adding up that the trade ban did not achieve its goal of loosening the Communist grip on the country.
- 2 Which of the following details BEST supports the central idea of the article?
- (A) The Obama administration now plans to open talks on other issues that divide the two nations, including the economic trade ban.
  - (B) Gross was convicted in 2011 of illegally bringing satellite phones and computer equipment to the Jewish community in Cuba.
  - (C) Congress passed the embargo to pressure Cuba to be more democratic.
  - (D) The meeting is between the heads of countries in North and South America to discuss issues they all have in common.
- 3 Select the sentence from the article that BEST explains why the Obama administration is moving to normalize relations with Cuba.
- (A) "U.S. politicians can support change in Cuba policy without great political risk."
  - (B) The Obama administration now plans to open talks on other issues that divide the two nations, including the economic trade ban.
  - (C) However, anti-Castro activists, including Florida's congressional delegation, are likely to oppose it.
  - (D) Experts thought that Obama would make a major move on restoring relations with Cuba.

- 4 President Obama can take all the following steps to normalize relations with Cuba EXCEPT:
- (A) He can lift the trade ban.
  - (B) He can open talks with Cuba.
  - (C) He can change diplomatic relations.
  - (D) He can ask Congress to lift the trade ban.