Agenda

• First class (10)
  – Logistics
  – Announcements
• Introductions (10)
• General questions about Cuba (10)
  – Have you been to Cuba?
  – What are your impressions?
• Background – Brief history (30)
• Discussion questions
• Break (15)
• Cuba “diplomacy” (30)
• Discussion Questions (15)
Back Channel to Cuba and Other Interesting Information
Back Channel to Cuba

• The Hidden History of Negotiations between Washington and Havana

• William M. LeoGrande

• Peter Kornbluh
Sources

• *Back Channel to Cuba* – William M. LeoGrande & Peter Kornbluh
  – Hundreds of documents formerly classified as top secret, interviews, intermediaries, and foreign government materials

• *Dateline Havana* – Reese Erlich

• Articles

• Personal conversations

• Observations
Back Channel to Cuba

• Invasions, economic embargo, covert operations, assassination plots using poison pens and exploding seashells
• Serious negotiations have occurred by every president since Eisenhower through secret, back channel negotiations
• Bilateral efforts toward rapprochement examples
  – Kennedy offers olive branch to Fidel Castro (start thinking along more flexible lines)
  – Kissinger’s top secret quest for normalization (deal straight and negotiate improved relations)
  – Jimmy Carter (presidential directive to achieve normalization)
  – Obama’s new approach
    • Moving beyond the legacy of hostility
Very Brief History

• Native groups: Guanajatabeyes, Siboneys, Tainos (originated Orinoco Basin of South America) – 2,500 BCE
• Columbus’ second landfall – 1492
  – Most beautiful place ever seen
  – Planted crosses at several stops
• Annexed by Spain for the Roman Catholic Church – 1510
• Most native groups destroyed or disappeared in the hills by mid-1550s
• Cuba strategic value
  – Trade
  – Defense
  – Well developed slave trade
  – Agriculture used for export/only slightly for domestic purposes
• Agricultural land in foreign hands – by 1950s 75%
• Sugar Cuba’s major export for nearly 200 years/Spain’s cash cow
• Slavery 1520s – 1886
• First Independence War 1860-1878
  – Insurrection continued
• Second Independence War 1895
• Spanish [Cuban] American War – 1898
  – USS Maine blew up (February 15, 1898)
  – Congress declared war on Spain
  – Swift victory for US
  – San Juan Hill (Teddy Roosevelt)
  – Treaty signed 1899
    • US gets Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, Philippines
      – Spain replaced by US
    • Cuba not included in treaty process
• Platt Amendment - 1901
  – Agreement between US and Cuba
  – Gave right of US to intervene in Cuba in order to preserve independence and government
  – US control of Cuba’s public finances
  – Acquire naval base at Guantanamo in 1903
  – Justified four US interventions
  – Became part of Cuba’s 1902 constitution (faced US occupation if not included)
  – Repealed 1934
• 1920s US controlled 2/3 of Cuban agriculture
  – Still little to no development of country (land or people)
  – People had little political power
  – Corrupt and repressive governments
• Communist Party first appeared – 1925
• Fidel Castro born August 13, 1926
• Batista 1901 – 1973
  – 1940 – 1944 president
  – 1940 new constitution (labor rights, minimum wage, equal pay for equal work)
    – considered progressive for its time
  – After four year term, went to Florida
  – Batista returned in 1952 – realizing he would lose the election he initiated a bloodless coup – suspended constitution - in office for seven years - dictatorship
  – Supported by US government and Mafia
  – Corrupt and violent
  – Cuba quasi independent
  – 1959 left Cuba for Dominican Republic – asylum in Portugal
  – Died 1973 of a heart attack
• July 26, 1953 Moncada Barracks Santiago de Cuba
  – Considered beginning of Cuban Revolution
  – Castro imprisoned
  – Released and went to Mexico to plan another revolution

• November 25, 1956, Castro returned from Mexico in Granma (1,200 miles; Fidel, Raul Castro, Che Guevara)
  – Circumstances fostered a guerilla war ethos
  – Defeated by Batista forces at first
  – Poor remained in poor health and uneducated
  – Large inequality among levels of society
  – Economy based primarily on one crop (sugar)
  – Slowly gained confidence of people and control
• Fidel Castro and a group of guerilla fighters successfully revolted against President Fulgencio Batista. Castro establishes a revolutionary socialist state.
• January 1, 1959 Batista ousted - Fidel Castro and Che Guevara took over
  – Socialism (move toward purer Communism)
  – Casinos closed
  – Agrarian reform-Serious economic reform
  – Racial equality
  – Rents reduced
  – Tenants rights
  – Ministries formed to oversee reforms
  – Sugar mills nationalized
  – Literacy crusade
Discussion Questions

– The US government often pushes a country toward democracy. Was Cuba ready for democracy in 1959? What in its history leads you to think what you do?

– Authoritarianism – what were the Cubans looking for at the time of the 1950s? They had little to no history of self government and mostly exploitive foreign domination.

– What do you see as the good and bad points of Castro’s nationalizing of land and appropriating industries?
Backdrop for non-diplomacy diplomacy

• Last diplomatic action between Cuba and US in January 1961
  – Almost immediately plots were hatched to assassinate Castro, many led by the US
  – November 1960 US trade embargo
  – 1961 Bay of Pigs (CIA sponsored)
    • Cuban exiles
    • Defeated within 48 hours
    • Victory speech – declared revolution and socialist state
  – 1962 Missile Crisis
    • Nuclear missiles placed on Cuban soil
    • Pawn of USSR
    • Spy satellites detect missiles
    • Letters between Kennedy and Khrushchev (not invade Cuba, remove nuclear missiles from Turkey, Italy if Soviets withdraw from Cuba)
  – 1963 travel bans
  – US foreign policy – isolation, economic denial, and CIA paramilitary attacks

• Communist party developed along Marxist-Leninist lines

• 1961 – 1991 Soviet domination
  – Increasing reliance on Russia
  – Purchase sugar
  – Supply oil
- Soviet Union dissolves
  - Last delivery of sugar to Russia in 1991
  - Cuba lost 80% of its trade
  - Cuba deep economic trough
  - Salaries dropped by 60%
  - Castro described this as Cuba’s “special period”
  “He was an independent Marxist, opposed to U.S. imperialism and favoring socialism for Cuba. But he had strong differences with the pro-Moscow Cuban Communist Party. The United States could have coexisted with an independent socialist Cuba . . . “ (Erlich, Dateline Havana, p. 21).
- Cuban troops come home from Africa
- Cuban military drastically reduced
• 1991 First time truly independent country
• Legalized small business
• Established agricultural coops
  • Organic farming
• Allowed remittance from relatives in the US
• Tourism
• High world prices for nickel and cobalt
• Trade with Venezuela
  • Medical personnel for oil
  • Venezuela collapses – more reforms under Raul
• China became trading partner
• A series of back channel communications for over 50 years.
• Clandestine methods: e.g., used literary figures, journalists, politicians, businessmen, furtive meetings in foreign cities
• Every president since Eisenhower has engaged in some kind of communication with Castro and his representatives
• Bilateral efforts at dialogue, rapprochement and reconciliation – a diplomatic minuet
• Topics of mutual interest: e.g., air piracy, drug interdiction, immigration
Irritants for US

- Cuba attempts to spread Communism in South American – part of Cold War (No communist government in Western Hemisphere)
- Support of Marxist Guerilla movements in South America
- Supported armed revolution in Venezuela and Brazil (No communist supported military bases in Western Hemisphere)
- Support for Puerto Rico independence
  - World Peace Council International Conference of Solidarity with the Independence of Puerto Rico (September 1975)
  - Notes passed first by US then by Cuba (Bar in LaGuardia Airport)
- Military Associations - Support of pro-socialist movements in Africa
  - Angola 1975
  - Ethiopia 1977 – 1989
- Also military associations with Grenada and Russia
- Cuba not doing enough to stop terrorists
- US political prisoners
- Fidel and Raul Castro
- Human rights violations
- Insistence by Cuba to end embargo before talks
- Human Rights issues – particularly treatment of prisoners
Irritants for Cuba
(at different points in time)

– US corporations owned economy (before Castro)
– Cuba long term history of foreign domination (Spain, US, Russia)
  • Not included in Spanish American War treaty
  • Not treated as equals
– Cuba a pawn of both US and USSR
– Cuba largely isolated from non-Communist world
– US control of Guantanamo
– Sovereignty
  • Free to maintain whatever political and economic system suits it
  • Free to establish its own foreign policy
– Every time about to meet US demands US would raise the bar
– Considered a terrorist state
Complications - US

- Hawks and doves
- The history of talks has been inextricably intertwined with, and overshadowed by, the more infamous history of acrimony and distrust in U.S.-Cuban relations
- Cold war
- Cuban lobby
- Untimely overtures
- Lack of understanding of Cuban nationalism
- Unrealistic demands (give up socialism)
  - Free elections
- Castro used US as scapegoat
The Cuban Lobby

• No engagement with Cuba
  – Campaign contributions
  – Votes

• Achievements
  – Radio/TV Marti
  – Cuban Democracy Act of 1992 – tightened embargo)
  – Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act of 1996 (Helms-Burton Act) – embargo in law

• Attitudinal change
  – Younger and new arrivals more open to reconnecting
  – Central and South American countries push for end to sanctions
US Interests Section

- Establish interest sections in countries to which we are not talking
- Ties with Cuba cut on January 3, 1961
- Interest Section September 1, 1977 – July 20, 2015
- US Foreign Service personnel and locals
- Housed in Swiss Embassy and represented by Swiss
- Also Cuban Interests Section in DC and represented by Czechoslovakia
- Resumed role as embassy on July 20, 2015
Venezuela

• Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez and Fidel Castro sign an agreement allowing Venezuela to send oil to Cuba at a heavily discounted price in return for Cuban support and services in education, health care, science, and technology.

• In ensuing years, the trade terms increase as Venezuela sends more oil in return for a greater amount of technical personnel from Cuba, including physicians, teachers, and other social service workers.
Eisenhower 1953 - 1961

- Schemes hatched to assassinate Castro
- Plans for regime change in Cuba
- “The first major U.S.-Cuban schism came not over socialism or ties with the USSR but over land reform” (Erlich, Dateline Havana, p. 21).
- “Anticommunism was the excuse, not the cause, of U.S. antagonism” (Erlich, Dateline Havana, p. 21).
  - Cuban Agrarian Reform Law
    - Foreign-owned land turned over to farmer co-ops
    - US threatens to stop buying Cuban sugar
April 1959

- Fidel Castro visited US
  - Open a dialogue with US – not very successful
  - Did not request economic aid
  - Eisenhower refused to see him
  - Big hit with Americans
  - Met with CIA
    - CIA tried to recruit Castro in fight against Communism
  - Met with Nixon
    - Castro naïve about communist threat
    - Lectured Castro
Castro nationalizes all foreign assets in Cuba, hikes taxes on American imports, and establishes trade deals with the Soviet Union. President Dwight D. Eisenhower retaliates by slashing the import quota for Cuban sugar, freezing Cuban assets in America, imposing a near-full trade embargo, and cutting off diplomatic ties with the Castro government.
Kennedy – 1961 - 1963

• Hatched schemes to assassinate Castro
  – Senator Frank Church report “From 1960-1963 the CIA engaged in at least eight plans to assault or murder Fidel Castro” (Erlich, Dateline Havana, p. 22).
• Implemented plan left from Eisenhower administration (Bay of Pigs)
• Declared complete US economic embargo [1,200 Petite Hupmann Cuban cigars for Kennedy] – restricting travel and trade
• Operation Mongoose headed up by Bobby Kennedy – terrorist tactics
• A naval blockade of Cuba (during missile crisis)
• Secret negotiations between US and USSR – Cuba not included
Kennedy

• Direct message to Castro through a French journalist

• Peace mission
  – Castro’s response was very positive
  – Death of Kennedy before acted on
    • “This is the end of your mission of peace” (Castro)
1962/63 Negotiations

• James Donovan
  – Secured freedom of more than one thousand members of the CIA-led exile brigade captured during Bay of Pigs
  – Secured freedom of several dozen US citizens detained after the revolution
  – Castro interested in commencing relations with US
  – However, CIA scheme using scuba equipment to kill Castro
Johnson – 1963 - 1969

• Lisa Howard
  – Correspondent ABC news
  – Private channel of communications
  – Castro and Howard conferred about sustaining secret communications (election politics-kept quiet for 35 years)
    • Cuba a political football and would play along if Johnson took a hard line toward Cuba
    • Resume secret talks from a position of strength for Cuba
    • Castro pledges absolute secrecy
Spring 1964

- Coast Guard seized four Cuban fishing boats in US territorial waters
- Fishermen held
- Cuba said “piratically kidnapped by the North American government.”
- Johnson’s private comment: “A damn fool thing to pick them up. . . .“
- Castro cut off water to Guantanamo
- Johnson fired Cubans working on the base
- Castro threaten to fire on U-2 reconnaissance planes
- Johnson needed to warn Cuba not to interfere with reconnaissance planes – used “black channel” diplomacy
  - Needed to do this quietly
  - Message sent through the Czech ambassador to Washington
• The Lyndon B. Johnson administration enacts a law allowing anyone who flees Cuba and reaches the United States the opportunity to pursue U.S. citizenship a year later. As a later result of the 1986 Immigration Reform Act and a 1994 migration agreement with Cuba, the “wet foot, dry foot” policy sends Cuban nationals found in the waters between the two nations back home while those who land on dry ground can remain in the United States.

• US agents introduced swine fever virus into Cuba “In 1977, the Washington Post confirmed, ‘The CIA had a program aimed at Cuban agriculture, and since 1962 Pentagon specialists had been manufacturing biological agents to be used for this purpose.’ (Erlich, p. 29)

• Nixon disliked Castro intensely
Kissinger waning weeks of Nixon presidency

• Sends short, handwritten, unsigned note to Castro
  – Wanted to discuss bilateral issues
• Castro sent a short reply and cigars
• Over 18 months of meetings held
  – Airport lounges
  – New York hotels
  – Private homes
Ford – 1974 - 1977

- Cuba involved in armed revolutionary struggles (Nicaragua, Grenada)
- Soviet backed regimes (Ethiopia)
- Angola civil war

- Loosened regulations for licensed travel to Cuba for religious, educational and cultural groups in the late 1970s
- Lifted certain currency controls
- Upgraded diplomatic relations
- The only president during 50 years that acknowledged Cuba not a major threat
- Backtracked later in administration
  - Mariel
  - Carter demanded that Cuba leave Africa before diplomatic relations could be reestablished – Cuba refused
Mariel Boatlift

• 12 Cubans drove through gates of Peruvian Embassy in Havana demanding asylum
• Peruvians granted asylum
• Peru invited any Cuban seeking asylum to come to the embassy = thousands
• President Carter said “‘we’ll continue to offer an open heart and open arms to refugees seeking freedom from Communist domination and from economic deprivation, brought about primarily by Fidel Castro and his government’” (Erlich, p. 33)
• Mariel boat lift – Castro took Carter up on his offer
  – As many as 125,000 Cubans went to Florida
• Special treatment for Cuban asylum seekers
Regan – 1981 - 1989

- 1980-81 closed the doors to travel
- US sent troops to Grenada to “protect US medical students”
- 350,000 Cubans infected with type II dengue virus “In 1984, a leader of Omega 7, a terrorist exile group based in Miami, admitted in court to spreading the dengue virus” (Erlich, p. 30).
- Reimposed currency controls
- Added to list of terrorist states
- Perceived rascals and scoundrels harbored in Cuba

• Closed doors to most travelers after Cuban crackdown on dissidents
• Generally followed same path as President Regan
Clinton – 1993 - 2001

• Attempts a relaxation in 1995
• Helms-Burton Act – 1996 places embargo into federal law
  – Tightens embargo
  – Codifies embargo
  – Penalizes foreign companies doing business with Cuba
  – Sanction lifted under certain conditions
    • Remove Fidel and Raul from office
    • Move toward free elections
    • Develop free press
    • Release all political prisoners
Espionage

- The Clinton administration charges five Cuban counterintelligence officers in the United States with conspiracy to commit espionage,
- The five were sent by the Castro government to infiltrate several Cuban-American exile groups based in Miami,
- Two released at the end of their terms in 2011 and 2014
- Three released on December 17, 2014, as part of a prisoner swap for a U.S. intelligence officer held in Havana.
- The exchange precedes the announcement that the United States and Cuba will resume full diplomatic ties.
Elian Gonzalez

- Six-year-old
- Sole survivor of his family’s attempt to immigrate to the United States by boat,
- Ignites a media storm as the Clinton administration decides whether to allow the child’s Miami relatives to keep him or to send him back to his father in Cuba.
- After a seven-month federal legal battle that reaches the United States Supreme Court, Elian returns to his family in Cuba,
- He becomes a member of the Communist youth and a champion swimmer.

• Strengthened US embargo
• Fidel Castro retires after a long illness and formally hands over the presidency to his brother, Raúl.
Obama – 2009 - 2017

- President Barack Obama eases restrictions on travel and remittances to Cuba, allowing Cuban-Americans to send unlimited funds to family and non-family members in Cuba and permitting travel there for religious and educational purposes.
- Cuban Americans unlimited trips to Cuba
- Send unlimited money to relatives
- Softens US embargo
- Liberalized bank transfers
- Reopen embassies
- Commercial flights
- Secret negotiations leading to change – another chapter of the book
• 2012 Amid a slew of other economic reforms, Raúl Castro’s government removes bureaucratic requirements for Cubans to obtain government permission to travel abroad

• 2014 Cuba hosts the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) two-day summit
  – CELAC is considered a regional alternative to the Organization of American States (OAS), from which Cuba’s membership has been suspended since 1962

• 2014 U.S. President Barack Obama and Cuban President Raul Castro announce the restoration of full diplomatic ties following a swap of a U.S. intelligence officer who had been held in Havana for the three remaining Cuban Five prisoners
  – U.S. subcontractor Alan Gross, jailed since 2009, is released at the same time. The prisoner exchange and release of Gross comes after nearly eighteen months of secret talks between U.S. and Cuban officials that Pope Francis helped broker
• 2015 Cuba removed from list of state sponsors of terrorism
  – Designation, first imposed in 1982, had prevented Cuba from accessing international finance
  Obama's met with Raul Castro in April 2015, the first face-to-face discussion between U.S. and
  Cuban heads of state in more than half a century.
• 2015 The United States and Cuba reopen embassies in each other’s capitals.
  – Both had been closed since 1961.
  – Members of the Republican-controlled U.S. Congress condemn the move and vow to uphold
    the economic embargo.
  – Trade embargo can’t be lifted without congressional approval
  – Neither country appoints an ambassador upon the embassies’ reopening. The top U.S.
    diplomat in Havana is the charge d’affaires, Jeffrey DeLaurentis. Cuba’s foreign minister, Bruno
    Rodriguez, oversees the reopening of Havana’s embassy in Washington.
• 2016 The United States and Cuba sign an agreement to allow commercial flights
  between the two countries
  – Cuban airlines were not expected to offer flights to the United States in the near future due to
    U.S. regulations and the risk of seizure.
  – Days after the agreement was reached, the White House announces that President Barack
    Obama would travel to Cuba in March 2016, marking the first time in nearly ninety years that
    a sitting U.S. president will visit the island nation.
Now

• In the last fiscal year, 43,000 Cubans arrived in the US
• Many come with the help of coyotes, crossing the border in Texas and subject to many of the same hazardous as those crossing the border illegally
• Cuban Adjustment Act 1966
  – Cubans arriving in US are granted permission to stay legally
  – Eligible for federal welfare benefits, permanent residency, and a path to citizenship
  – Included are Social Security number, food stamps, work permits, Medicaid, and other benefits
• Many now fear this window will close
Policy

• Threat of Cuba foreign policy to US (relationship with Russia)
• Political influence of Cuban American lobby declining
• Attitude of Latin America
• Changes in Cuba

• Rise to importance on policy-makers’ agenda
• Feasible solution
• Politically viable
Discussion Questions

• Cuba has no history of self governance. Is a dictatorship the best form of government for the country?

• Our government chose not to tell us very much about what was going on over the years in Cuba. Is this the right approach? What should we know, and what shouldn’t we know? Should our government tell us more about what it is doing related to diplomacy?
Lessons

• Even at moments of intense hostility, there have always been reasons and opportunities for dialogue.
• Although Cuban leaders have always been willing to talk, they instinctively resist making concession to US demands.
• Nevertheless, Cuba has been willing to take steps responsive to US concerns so long as those steps come at Havana’s own initiative, not as explicit concessions.
• Small successes do not necessarily lead to big ones.
• Cuban leaders have had a hard time distinguishing between gestures and concessions.
• Timing is everything.
• An incremental approach to normalization has not worked.
• Domestic politics is always an issue on both sides.
• Neither side really comprehends the other’s bureaucracy, so the opportunities for misunderstanding abound.
• Cuba wants to be treated as an equal, with respect for its national sovereignty.