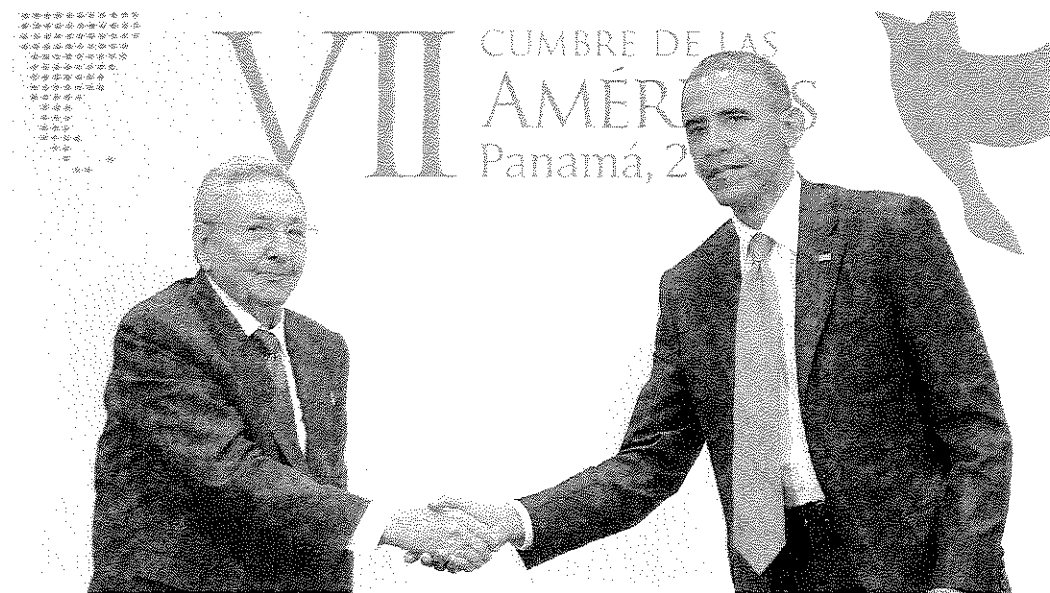


President Obama says he doesn't believe Cuba is supporting terrorism

By Washington Post, adapted by Newsela staff on 04.17.15

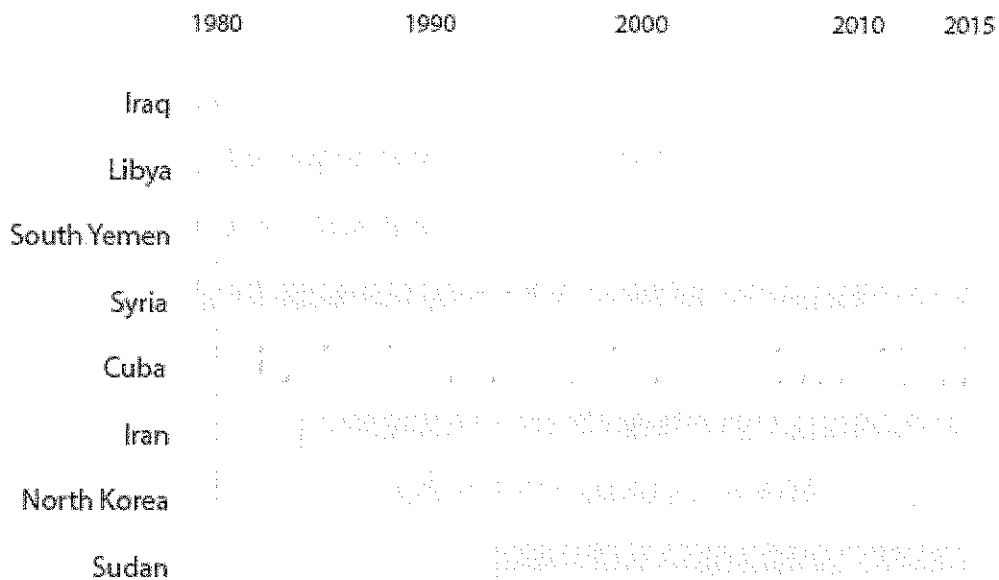
Word Count **806**



U.S. President Barack Obama (right) and Cuban President Raul Castro shake hands during their meeting at the Summit of the Americas in Panama City, Panama, April 11, 2015. The leaders of the United States and Cuba held their first formal meeting in more than half a century, clearing the way for a normalization of relations that had seemed unthinkable to both Cubans and Americans for generations. Photo: AP/Pablo Martinez Monsivais

Countries designated state sponsors of terrorism

Eight countries have been named state sponsors of terror since the list began in 1979. Currently, four countries are on the list, but the Obama administration has informed Congress that it will remove Cuba.



Source: Congressional Research Service

THE WASHINGTON POST

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama has cleared the way for establishing diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba.

In a message to Congress this week, Obama said he plans to remove Cuba from the list of state sponsors of terrorism. The list is made up of counties that provide support for terrorism. The decision also recognizes that Cuba's role in promoting revolution in Latin America has long ago slipped into history.

The announcement follows a pledge made by Obama and Cuban President Raúl Castro to move toward normal relations.

Cuba Once Supported Revolutions

Congress has 45 days to consider Cuba's removal from the list. Lawmakers cannot interfere with Obama's decision without voting on the matter. The Obama administration considers that to be unlikely.

In a news conference, Obama said a majority of Americans approve of his opening the doors to Cuba.

Diplomatic relations with Cuba were broken more than 50 years ago following the communist Cuban revolution that brought Fidel Castro, Raul Castro's brother, to power. Under communism, the government owns all property and

people have few freedoms. Cuba was first designated a state sponsor of terrorism in 1982. At the time, Cuba actively supported revolutionary movements, particularly in Latin America.

"Our hemisphere, and the world, look very different today than they did 33 years ago," Secretary of State John Kerry said.

Many of the problems in Latin America remain, including corruption, violence and drugs. However, every country in Latin America — except for Cuba — has a democratically elected government. The violent revolutions that once shook the region have long since died out.

And Then There Were Three

If Cuba is taken off the terror list, only three countries remain. They are Iran, Sudan and Syria.

Josefina Vidal is the the director of U.S. relations at Cuba's Foreign Ministry. She said Obama's decision is a just one, adding that Cuba never deserved to be on the terror list in the first place.

She said that Cuba rejects and condemns terrorism. It also is against "any act whose objective is to encourage, support, finance or give shelter to terrorists."

Obama told Congress that Cuba is not currently supporting international terrorism. It also has promised not to support it in the future.

The State Department recommended taking Cuba off the list. Kerry said that while the United States disagrees with many of Cuba's policies and actions, they are not considered terrorism under American law.

Kerry is looking forward to going to Cuba as soon as possible to open the embassy there, an official said. Countries with normal relations have embassies in each others countries and exchange ambassadors.

The embassies would be in the same buildings that once served as the diplomatic headquarters of both nations.

Other Restrictions Will Remain

U.S. officials said that full normalization of relations with Cuba could take years. Currently, American companies are not allowed to do business with Cuba. Travel is limited. Only Congress can remove the trade and travel bans against Cuba. But the president has the power to establish diplomatic relations.

Before Tuesday's announcement, high-level Cuban and U.S. officials held three rounds of talks on establishing formal relations. Cuba had demanded that the United States take it off the terror list. For its part, the United States said that its officials must be able to freely move around the island. Also, Cuban citizens could not be kept from entering the U.S. Embassy.

A country on the United States' terrorism list cannot buy arms from the United States or receive economic help. There are many other restrictions against Cuba, which will remain in effect under other laws.

"A More Open And Tolerant Cuba"

Democratic Senator Richard J. Durbin of Illinois participated in the effort to reach an agreement with Cuba. He said that while he is not a fan of the Castro government, "I continue to believe that opening up the island to American ideas, vibrancy and trade is the most effective way to see a more open and tolerant Cuba."

Opponents in Congress were led by Cuban-American Senators Robert Menendez, a Democrat from New Jersey, and Marco Rubio, a Republican from Florida. Rubio just announced he is a candidate for president. In the past, several Americans have fled to Cuba to escape criminal charges. The senators argue that Cuba should not be taken off the list because their refusal to send the fugitives back is equal to supporting terrorism.

But the Obama administration has said that is not required to take Cuba off the terror list.

One of the fugitives is Joanne Chesimard, now known as Assata Shakur. She killed a New Jersey State Police officer in 1973 and escaped from prison after being convicted of the murder.

Republican Senator John McCain of Arizona said Cuba should send Shakur back. "It might be a nice gesture, but it's not going to happen."

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

By Tribune Washington Bureau, adapted by Newsela staff on 12.18.14

Word Count **697**



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. Photo: 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.

As U.S.-Cuba relationship warms up, trade possibilities are bubbling

By Miami Herald,, adapted by Newsela staff on 03.08.15

Word Count **926**



A sugarcane worker rests at the end of his lunch break under a mural of Cuba's late revolutionary hero, Ernesto "Che" Guevara, at the steam plant that's part of the 30 November Sugar Center. After President Barack Obama's December 2014 announcement that he was loosening the embargo on Cuba, change appears likely to come fastest in agriculture. Photo: AP/Ramon Espinosa

The U.S. government is making it easier for Cuban entrepreneurs to sell their products to American customers. The State Department recently announced that private entrepreneurs in Cuba would be allowed to export certain products to the United States.

U.S. government officials published a list of products that could not be traded between the countries. That left many people wondering how much the new policy would actually affect the economies in Cuba and the United States.

One Miami attorney saw an opportunity in the confusing regulations, which are called the U.S. Harmonized Tariff Schedule. Lenny Feldman decided to make a clear list of the products that could be exported from Cuba under the new rules. He calls this his "yes" list. It includes the specific goods that self-employed workers from Cuba are now permitted to sell to the United States.

Embargo Began In 1960 After Cuban Revolution

The U.S. government first placed a trade embargo against Cuba in 1960, after Fidel Castro's Communist government came to power in a revolution. The embargo made it illegal for Americans to trade with Cuba. The embargo has remained in place for decades. This year, President Barack Obama announced that the United States would normalize relations with Cuba. The two countries have begun to make peace after years as enemies. Making exceptions to the embargo is part of that process.

Feldman's list catalogs which items are exceptions and can now be sold under the U.S. Harmonized Tariff Schedule.

It turns out that the list is pretty long. There are more products that can be imported than many people originally thought. This is good news for the more than 480,000 Cuban *cuentapropistas* — the Cuban word for entrepreneur.

The State Department hopes the new rules will make it easier for these private entrepreneurs to be able to develop products and sell them.

Live Animals And Animal Products Prohibited

The U.S. Harmonized Tariff Schedule prohibits the export from Cuba of all live animals and animal products. It does allow raw hides, skins, leather, furs, saddles and harnesses, handbags and travel goods to be sold.

Paper products, plastics and rubber, ceramics, glass, pieces of stone, plaster and cement, footwear, hats, umbrellas, toys and games, artificial flowers and feathers are allowed as well.

Also permitted are soap, cosmetics, candles, waxes, polishes, perfume, and photography goods made by independent entrepreneurs. Jewelry-makers were given the green light too.

Cuentapropistas can also export some home goods, watches and musical instruments to the United States.

While some more sophisticated products are allowed too, it is not clear how many independent entrepreneurs or private companies are actually making these in Cuba right now.

New Policies Intended To Support Cuban Entrepreneurs

While the State Department is permitting many items, it has said no to many others, such as sugar, prepared food and beverages, and aircraft.

Many of the items on the "no" list are produced by government-owned companies, according to Ted Piccone, an economics researcher.

The purpose of the new policies, he said, is to support Cuba's private workers and companies. Currently, the Cuban government controls almost the entire Cuban economy. That can make supporting private businesses a challenge.

The new policies take into account the fact that the government produces many products. It attempts to include only products the government does not manufacture. That may explain why some items are on "yes" list while others are not, even though the products are sometimes very similar. Feldman admitted it can get tricky.

While wool and cotton are not allowed to be exported, many other fabrics are permitted. The policy allows knitted and woven clothes, lace, embroidery, carpets and other floor coverings, and textiles made from felt, twine, rope, vegetable fibers and man-made materials.

Trade Still Won't Be Easy

The State Department said the import list should help independent Cuban entrepreneurs do more business, improve their lives, and create positive change within their communities.

Even though the policies create a more open and trade-friendly economy, it does not mean that exchanges with small private Cuban businesses and entrepreneurs will be easy.

Piccone said that some of the laws within Cuba may need to be reformed. He said Cuban officials are not yet ready to regulate, control and tax the products that might be entering the country.

The State Department said it "cannot predict what the Cuban government will or will not allow" even with the U.S. Harmonized Tariff Schedule in place. Officials hope Cuban officials adopt the ideas and continue to provide opportunities to private-sector workers.

Another challenge is that there is currently no direct mail service between Cuba and the U.S. That could make shipping goods between the countries difficult. Currently, products that are sent to Cuba from the United States go by ship.

Making Trade Happen With Suitcase Commerce

At first, the countries might need to exchange goods using a system called suitcase commerce. Suitcase commerce depends on travelers carrying permitted goods in their luggage and transporting materials that way.

Another factor that might make adopting the new rules complicated is Cuba's currency system. The country has a dual currency system, using both Cuban pesos and Cuban convertible pesos (CUC). Pesos are used for most salaries

and everyday purchases and the value of one CUC is approximately 25 pesos. CUC are used by state companies and in the public sector; one CUC is worth one American dollar.

There are still many questions about how the new policies will impact the economy in Cuba. Piconne said nobody knows how the country will handle payments and the new products that might be traded.