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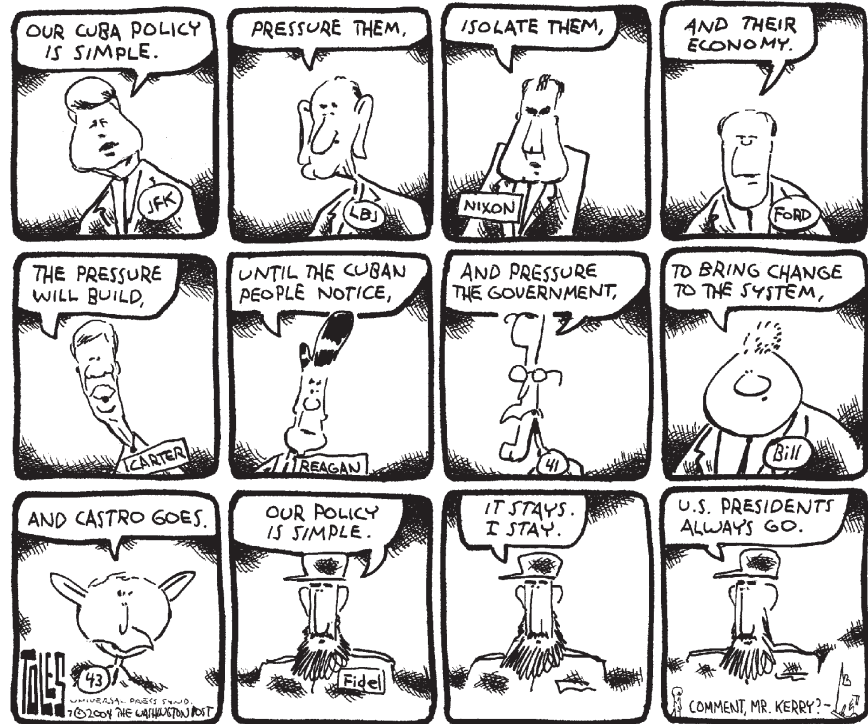
## Background on U.S.-Cuba Relations

On December 17, 2014, Cuban President Raúl Castro and U.S. President Barack Obama simultaneously announced that Cuba and the United States would begin normalizing relations—ending a period of over five decades during which the two countries had no diplomatic ties. Cuba and the United States will open embassies in each other's countries, travel will become easier, and representatives of both countries will be able to engage in direct diplomatic discussions.

### What is the history of U.S.-Cuba relations?

U.S. President Eisenhower originally cut off U.S. relations with Cuba in 1961. Fidel Castro (Raúl Castro's brother and Cuba's leader for nearly fifty years) and his supporters had taken control of Cuba's government in 1959, marking the beginning of the Cuban Revolution. While U.S. officials initially recognized Cuba's new government, they grew increasingly wary of the Cuban Revolution.

Over the next few years, relations between the two countries soured. Cuba nationalized (brought under government control) many U.S.-owned properties and businesses on the island, and the United States stopped buying Cuban sugar (which was central to Cuba's economy). Cuba entered into new trade and military agreements with the Soviet Union. In the midst of the Cold War, Cuba's relationship with the Soviet Union especially troubled U.S. officials. In 1962, the U.S. government secretly began trying to overthrow the Cuban government, its most famous attempt being the failed Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961. The



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United States also instituted a full economic embargo, halting all trade with Cuba. (The embargo is still in effect today.) Tensions rose to a high during the Cuban Missile Crisis—when the United States discovered that Cuba had allowed the Soviets to build a nuclear missile base on the island in October 1962.

Since relations between the United States and Cuba deteriorated in the early 1960s, successive U.S. presidents have continued policies that isolate Cuba both politically and economically. U.S. attempts at ousting Cuba's revolutionary government have continued, and the Castro regime has become known for its anti-U.S. stance and repression of political freedoms.

### How did the relationship between Cuba and the United States change in 2014?

Despite this frozen relationship, U.S. and Cuban officials have secretly tried many times to normalize relations between the two countries, yet none of these efforts succeeded until 2014. The deal that led to the December

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17 announcement involved the exchange of prisoners being held in both Cuba and the United States and was secretly negotiated for over eighteen months. In addition to restoring diplomatic ties, the deal made it easier for U.S. citizens to travel to Cuba and for U.S. businesses—especially those related to internet and other forms of technology and communication—to work with Cuban companies.

Previous U.S. administrations had gone into talks with Cuban officials with the expectation that normalizing relations would be such a major breakthrough for Cuba that the Cuban government would need to give something major in return—like changing its foreign policy, becoming more democratic, or improving its treatment of political dissidents. But the Obama administration did not go into the talks with any conditions outside of the prisoner exchanges. Obama announced that the United States still wants Cuba to improve its human rights record and increase democratic freedoms, but neither of these concerns were part of the United States' formal demands in restoring diplomatic relations.

***What challenges remain in the relationship between the United States and Cuba?***

Many issues remain in the relationship between the Cuban and U.S. governments. The U.S. government claims that Cuba owes billions of dollars for the land and businesses

of U.S. citizens that were nationalized in the 1960s. The Cuban government has worked out debt repayments with every country it owes for the nationalizations except the United States. The U.S. government still spends millions of dollars each year on programs to destabilize the Cuban government, including providing money to exile organizations, support to dissidents and families of political prisoners in Cuba, and funding for anti-Castro TV and radio channels (called TV Martí and Radio Martí) broadcast from southern Florida.

The Cuban government, for its part, claims that the U.S. government owes \$25 billion for harm inflicted on Cuba by U.S.-sponsored terrorism and the embargo. While Obama has weakened the embargo during his presidency, U.S. law requires that Cuba begin a democratic transition before the embargo can be lifted. Any change to this policy must get congressional approval.

Despite these remaining issues, officials from both Cuba and the United States will, for the first time, attend the Summit of the Americas (where leaders of countries in North America, Central America, the Caribbean, and South America come together to discuss a variety of issues) in April 2015. This demonstrates that the change in U.S.-Cuba relations represents a historic shift not just for the two countries, but for the entire Western Hemisphere.