

**Forum:** Advisory Panel

**Issue:** Prevention of Cuba's Political Isolation from International Platforms

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## Introduction

Cuba is a country consisting of the island Cuba, the biggest island of the Republic of Cuba and the biggest island in the Caribbean, and some smaller islands in the Caribbean region. The Republic of Cuba gained its independence from Spain in 1902 with the Treaty of Paris, subsequent to the Spanish-American War. Cuba remains as one of the few communist states today. The country is known for its revolutionary political figures, Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, who led the Cuban Revolution back in the 1950s. Cuba is also known in the international community with human rights abuses and has been reported by many organizations on systematic human rights violations such as arbitrary imprisonment, media censorship, and unfair trials.

The issue of Cuba's political isolation is collateral, as there are many historical, geographical, and political reasons. To understand the roots of the issue, the delegates should pay attention to Cuba's political history, its past allies and government model, as well as outer factors such as the Cold War. The visible effects of Cuba's political isolation date back to the 1960s, post Cuban Revolution era, when many economic and political changes were made by Castro, which altogether stimulated many other events. In addition, politically stirring events occurred in these years, such as the Cuban Missile Crisis, which was a political and a militaristic dispute between the United States and the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) that was a result of the Soviets arming the Cuban island with nuclear arsenal.

After the collapse of the USSR, Cuba lost support from its communist partners in northern

Europe-Asia. This pushed the country to look for new economic and strategic partners. So in the last 20 years, the government has been following a way milder socialist propaganda to seek international support. Even though Cuba's political isolation has been in the agenda of several international organizations' agenda, the issue remains unsolved to the current day.

## Definition of Key Terms

**Communism:** Communism is a political and economic ideology that aims to establish a state in which the natural resources and the major means of production are under public ownership of the government. Throughout the 20th century, the communist idea was very popular and there were many communist states; however, the number significantly reduced to this day. Only a few communist regimes remain today such as China, Cuba, Vietnam, and North Korea. Communism depends on fair sharing of the profits among the worker class, so money is given to those who have worked to gain it. So in a communist system, the income gap between a parliamentarian and a worker is very minor, if not zero.

**Cold War:** The Cold War is a decades long dispute between the United States and the USSR, starting in post World War II era and ending with the collapse of the USSR in 1991. As the states were two major influencers in world politics after World War II, they saw each other as a great enemy. In an attempt to show their power, both countries invested in the military and nuclear weapons. The countries also provided their allies with arms, to further enhance their ascendancy. However, these arms were never used, as there was no gunfight. The countries improved their arsenals to spread fear against the enemy. This got to a point that the both sides were armed with an enormous amount of nuclear warheads, that both sides were paranoid in gathering even more. So the cold war became a manner of outmaneuvering the other. The effects of Cold War are still prominent in current day disputes. For example the Syrian Civil War, is a disputed site where the United States and Russia are favoring opposite sides of the conflict.

**Embargo:** An embargo is an order put up by a government that restricts the trade of specified goods from another state. Countries can put up embargoes due to many reasons, which are usually results of political disputes.

## General Overview

The island of Cuba was colonized by Spain, with the arrival of Christopher Columbus in Latin America in 1492. The island, under the rule of Spanish for more than 4 centuries, was a major economy in Latin America due to its rich natural resources. As a result of this wealthiness and the uprisings in many other Spanish colonies in the region, the Spanish started increasing taxes in many Latin American colonies. The rise of taxes and the independence wars in Latin America in



Photo 1: Cuba on the World Map

the early nineteenth century resulted in the arising of Cuban nationalism. These nationalist ideas made the Cuban declare war against the Spanish in 1868. This war; however, ending in 1878, didn't result in Cuba's independence. Another rising power in the region though, United States of America, invaded Cuba in 1898 as a result of their economic interest and opposition against Spain. This is also a part of the Spanish-American War, which ended the Spanish colonialism in Latin America.

After the Spanish-American War, the Republic of Cuba, an independent state, though controlled extensively by the United States, was declared in 1902, as a result of the Treaty of Paris signed in 1898. For the first time after the colonization of the island in 1392, a country other than Spain was ruling the island: United States.

Due to geographical and political adjacency, the Cuban economy was heavily dependent on the exports made to the United States of America, Cuba's chief economic partner at the time. Until the Cuban Revolution in the 1950s, the United States remained a big influencer in Cuban politics and many times intervened with the government. Cuba faced severe economic difficulties, with the rest of the world, during the post World War 1 era. This is when political

corruption started to take over Cuba, while the United States companies were overwhelmingly active in the Cuban economy.

On 26th July 1953, Fidel Castro, a communist Cuban, started what will later be called the Cuban Revolution. This was the beginning of a 5 year civil war in Cuba, which would result in Castro's overthrow of the government and his establishment of communist Cuba. Castro started reshaping Cuba's economic and political structure and diverted the country's economic orientation from the United States to Soviets.

In the 1960s, Cubans started buying oil from Soviets; however, the United States owned oil refineries refused to process the oil bought from the Soviets as a virtual embargo. The delegates should be reminded that this is also the time the Cold War was escalating, and the United States was fighting against communism and the USSR. Castro

responded to this virtual embargo by nationalizing all United States owned refineries. As a response, the United States embargoed Cuban sugar, which was the major export of Cuba at the time. Castro then nationalized all United States owned companies in Cuba, and the United States President at the time, Eisenhower, stopped diplomatic relations with Cuba.

As the United States stopped economic and diplomatic relations with Cuba, Castro sought to be allied with the Soviet Union and declared Cuba a socialist state in 1961. During this time, the United States also tried to invade Cuba, though this wasn't successful. After the failed invasion attempt, Cuba officially declared itself as a communist state in that year.

In 1962, the newly elected President of United States John F. Kennedy declared a whole economic embargo on Cuba, which still remains intact as of today. The Cuban call these



Photo 2: Fidel Castro

embargoes “*el bloqueo*”, the blockades.

In response to the United States embargoes, and as a manner to further ally with the Soviets, Fidel Castro agreed to install Soviet Missiles in Cuba. This was a major threat to the United States due to Cuba’s geographical proximity to the United States. The issue was diplomatically solved by the United States and the USSR; however, these series of events that are later on called “the Cuban Missile Crisis” caused the United States and Cuba to politically polarize even more.

From the 1960s to the collapse of USSR, Castro improved living conditions in Cuba, while also supporting USSR by means of military action. Cuba supported socialism movement in Africa too, by sending troops and financing guerilla.

In the same time period, especially after the 1980s, many Latin and South American countries were starting to democratize, leaving fewer dictatorship regimes like Cuba in the region. This is the beginning of Cuba’s current day political isolation. Cuba as a state was respected on international platforms from the 1950s to 1980s, but the government’s image was damaged after these times, and Cuba took further opposition as they did not support the Latin American peace process.

The political isolation of Cuba conveyed further when the USSR collapsed in 1991 socialist Cuba lost many of its allies, especially in Eastern Europe. This also meant other socialist states in Africa under USSR influence were no longer allies of Cuba. Additionally, as Cuba’s economy declined drastically following the years of the fall of USSR, Cuba’s dependence on Soviets was revealed. Overall, Cuba lost a major part of its political influence and respect in the international platforms.

Another issue that caused Cuba’s isolation was human rights abuses, which took quite a lot of attention during the early 1990s. Both UNGA (United Nations General Assembly) and OHCHR (United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights) tried to tackle this issue, which will be discussed in another part of this paper, but Cuba did not fully cooperate with the UN and took opposition from many parties that support human rights movements.

The more current and significant development on the issue was the Helms-Burton Act. The formerly embargoes put up by John F. Kennedy by an Executive Order in 1962, were formalized

with the Helms-Burton Act, when it was legislated by the United States Congress and then signed by the United States President at the time, Bill Clinton in 1996. The act not only formalized the embargoes but also extended them, so that third party countries, corporations, and individuals would face sanctions by the United States if such entities are to trade with Cuba.

Helms-Burton act, even though corresponded with great opposition by many countries in international platforms, remained intact to the current day. This is due to the fact that the United States was, and still is, a major player in world politics after the fall of the USSR, and no country could totally oppose a superpower.

Therefore, the act caused many other third parties to cut trade with Cuba, leading to further political polarization.

Fidel Castro, due to his illness, designated his brother Raúl Castro to become the president of the country in early 2008. To this day, he remains as the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Cuba, which is the most senior position, even though he stepped of from the presidency in 2018. Raúl Castro has continued to seek normalization with the United States like his brother Fidel Castro and followed a mild socialist state policy.

## **Major Parties Involved and Their Views**

### **United States of America**

The United States wanted control of the island from the 19th century on, due to its rich natural resources and geographical proximity to the mainland United States. Their victory in the Spanish-American War meant the nation could settle more to the island, and with political and military interventions throughout the first half of the 20th century, the United States overruled the island.

The nationalist movements of Che Guevara, Fidel Castro, and their friends though, put the United States power at stakes, so during this period, the United States tried to intervene many times but was not successful. After the revolution, the United States became even more worried, as the new Cuba was a communist state, and the Cold War between the United States and

USSR was still going on. This started the United States sanctions and the polarization between the two countries.

In the post Soviet era, the United States continued its anti Cuban policy and further strengthened the sanctions during the presidency of Bill Clinton. Since the Soviet support was no longer present, this actually put Cuba in a worse place.

In the early 2000s, the United States tried to isolate Cuba from its Latin American neighbors such as Mexico. During this time, several small incidents happened between Cuba and the United States, such as the convicting of individuals from the opposed country, and the sanctions changed slightly during different United States governments, but they were more or the less same.

After this era, United States-Cuba relations developed over different presidential terms. Especially, during the presidency of Barack Obama, the relations significantly improved after several negotiations. This led to the lifting of some of the travel bans and other economic sanctions, in 2015, and resulted in re-opening of the countries' embassies, which closed in 1961.

Currently, though, with the presidential term of Donald Trump, the United States brought back some of the sanctions. The Cuban embassy in Washington DC and the American embassy in Havana remains open to this day.

## **Cuba**

During its early years, the Republic of Cuba was economically dependent on the United States, as the United States owned most of the corporations in Cuba. As this slowed down the economic growth, Cuba's prosperity levels downfall towards the 1950s, which also triggered the nationalist movements. The first oppositions of Cuba against the United States started in these years.

After the Cuban Revolution, the Cuban government was allied with the USSR and China, and further polarized from the United States and its European allies. Until the collapse of the USSR, Cuba was strongly allied with USSR and the Soviets supported Cuba economically. Therefore;

prosperity levels fell drastically after the collapse of the USSR. The country then started to open its economy to the foreign and has made its relations with many countries better since then. So the communist government model was beginning to be abandoned. This moderate political model is kept up to this day. So Cuba has been seeking to find new allies, improve its economy, and regain its status in international platforms.

The current Cuban government, led by Raúl Castro, Fidel Castro's brother, has been seeking normalization with the United States during Obama's term as the country faced many infrastructural problems during several decades of sanctions. However, after some travel sanctions were brought back by president Donald Trump, the Raúl Castro government has disputed the United States.

### **European Union**

The European Union and its constituent states are accusing Cuba of human rights violations, and therefore, are not in close relations with Cuba.

### **Russian Federation**

Cuba maintained close relations with the Russian Federation after the collapse of the USSR. Moreover, the two countries took bilateral relations forward when Russia's current president Vladimir Putin came to power. Especially in 2008 and 2009, the two countries improved economic relations with a series of diplomatic visits and deals.

### **Timeline of Events**

<b>20 May 1902</b>	Declaration of the Republic of Cuba.
<b>26 July 1953 - 1 January 1959</b>	Fidel Castro overthrew the government with the Cuban Revolution.
<b>3 January 1961</b>	The United States ended diplomatic relations with Cuba.
<b>16 April 1961</b>	Cuba was declared a communist state.
<b>7 February 1962</b>	The United States put up sanctions against Cuba.

<b>16 October 1962 - 28 October 1962</b>	“The Cuban Missile Crisis” took place.
<b>25 December 1991</b>	The USSR collapsed.
<b>12 March 1996</b>	Helms-Burton Act was legislated in the United States Congress.
<b>19 February 2008</b>	Fidel Castro handed the government to his brother, Raul Castro, due to his illness.
<b>20 July 2015</b>	The United States - Cuba diplomatic relations were re-established, and the countries opened embassies in the other country’s capital.

## **UN Involvement**

The United Nations hasn’t taken any significant action against the political isolation of Cuba. Even though several United Nations organs had the issue in their agenda over decades, no significant action was taken.

On the human rights issue, the United Nations General Assembly appointed a “special rapporteur” to investigate the issue in Cuba with a resolution in 1993. However, the Cuban government didn’t cooperate fully, so the issue of human rights remained intact in Cuba.

Cuba is an original member of the United Nations.

## **Relevant UN Documents**

Resolution on the Necessity of Ending Economic, Commercial, and Financial embargo imposed by the United States of America Against Cuba (17 March 1993, A/RES/47/19)

This resolution marks the first time the issue is discussed in the United Nations General Assembly and the agenda item has been included in the subsequent sessions, though the resolution remained the same and no further action was taken.

Resolution on the Situation of Human Rights in Cuba (28 January 1994, A/RES/48/142)

## **Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue**

### **Cuban Thaw**

The Cuban Thaw is a series of events starting on 17 December 2014, which restored diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba while also weakening the embargo. What will then be called by the media “the Cuban Thaw”, was the result of a series of negotiations between the United States President Barack Obama and the Cuban President Raúl Castro.

Obama and Castro announced that year a normalization process was beginning between Cuba and the United States. Following this, the diplomatic relations were reinstated the next year in 2015. Subsequent to this, Obama visited Cuba in 2016, marking the visit of a United States president for the first time in 88 years.

The achievements of the Cuban Thaw are impaired by the policies of the current United States government.

### **Possible Solutions**

Even though the main issue is between the United States and Cuba, the country is further isolated because of the human rights violation accusations. Many European countries and even the United States put this forth about Cuba. So a regulatory system that can report the human rights violations effectively can be useful. However, the delegates should keep in mind that the OHCHR (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights) has tried to tackle this issue with the same method in 1993, but was not successful as the Cuban government did not fully cooperate.

Another solution is, of course, to find a way of negotiation between the United States. Bearing in mind that the current United States government reinstated some of the sanctions as they believed the deal was non equivalent; the delegates should consider both parties' benefits while coming up with solutions.

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