



## **Engaging Cuba: A New Way Forward**

**Part 4 in a series on Defense, Development and Diplomacy**  
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### **PATRICK DOHERTY (MODERATOR)**

Deputy Director, American Strategy Program, and Director, U.S.-Cuba Policy Initiative, New American Foundation (Moderator)

### **JAKE COLVIN**

Vice President for Global Trade Issues,  
National Foreign Trade Council (NFTC)

### **PETER KORNBLUH**

Director, Cuba and Chile Documentation  
Projects, National Security Archives

### **DANIEL ERIKSON**

Senior Associate, U.S. Policy, and Director,  
Caribbean Programs, Inter-American  
Dialogue

### **WAYNE SMITH**

Senior Fellow, and Director, Cuba Program,  
Center for International Policy

## **DESCRIPTION AND MAJOR POLICY POINTS**

WASHINGTON, DC – The May **Conflict Prevention and Resolution Forum** (CPRF) was held at the John Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) on May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2009. Over 50 individuals from government agencies, think-tanks, non-profits and local universities attended the event. The CPRF is organized by the non-profit organization **Search for Common Ground**, and is co-sponsored by the **Alliance for Peacebuilding, American University, Council on Foreign Relations, George Mason University, Johns Hopkins University, Partners for Democratic Change, United States Institute of Peace and Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.**

Panelist **Wayne Smith**, Senior Fellow and Director of the Cuba Program at the **Center for International Policy** began by expressing his disappointment that more had not been done to change the current Cuba policy: “We had hoped that the Obama administration would have moved ahead more rapidly and resolutely than they have in changing the Cuban policy, which has been a failed policy...a miserably failed policy...for a long time.”

Smith continued by outlining some immediate steps the administration could take: “I would say first lift the travel controls. That is the most important thing...Remove Cuba from the terrorist list. They [the Cubans] didn’t even do that! I have been reading this terrorist lists for the past six years. There hasn’t been any evidence in them at all that would have placed Cuba as a terrorist state.”

Smith finished by reiterating the need for an immediate change to US policy on Cuba: “I left the Foreign Service in 1982. I didn’t want to be associated with this policy anymore...ladies and

gentleman that was 27 years ago, and here we are still with this policy...this failed, embarrassing policy. It is time for a change. I see no reason not to. I think we should increase the pressure on the administration.”

Smith served as Executive Secretary of President Kennedy’s Latin American Task Force and chief of mission at the U.S. Interests Section in Havana during his twenty-five years with the State Department.

**Peter Kornbluh**, the Director of the Cuba and Chile Documentation Projects at the **National Security Archives** focused on the diplomatic history of U.S.-Cuban relations, and how the lessons learned from history can direct policy today: “My task today is simply to leave you with a bit of the history of dialogue between the United States and Cuba, because the right wing is going to argue that any suggestion that President Obama should sit down with Raul Castro and that the United States should even negotiate seriously with Cuba is a radical position. But in fact, we have a very rich and detailed history of talks with Cubans spanning almost 50 years.”

Kornbluh went on to highlight past talks between the United States and their Cuban counterparts and what it means in relation to current U.S. policy: “The First lesson is clearly that the Cubans are interested, and have had an interest for 50 years, in better relations.”

“The second lesson from the talks that have taken place...” Kornbluh continued, “is that the U.S. approach, which has been a kind of range from what Kissinger called ‘reciprocity’... to the Clinton administration’s effort to do something they called ‘calibrated response’. None of these works.”

“The final lesson...” finished Kornbluh, “is basically that the United States should move much more concretely to actually simply normalizing relations with Cuba...a fundamental formula that would work: go ahead, with presidential discretion, move towards actually normalizing relations in the general sense and then through the mechanisms that are created by normal relations begin to address the very issues that the United States feels are important.”

Kornbluh has appeared on national television and radio broadcast as well as numerous documentary films, including the Oscar winning "Panama Deception," the History Channel's "Bay of Pigs Declassified," "The Trials of Henry Kissinger," and "The Judge and the General" about the prosecution of General August Pinochet. In November 2003, he served as producing consultant on the Discovery Times documentary, "Kennedy and Castro: The Secret History." More recently, he was an historical consultant on Steven Soderbergh's two-part biopic of Che Guevara, starring Benicio Del Toro.

**Daniel Erikson**, Senior Associate of U.S. Policy, and Director of Caribbean Programs at **Inter-American Dialogue**, addressed the inconsistencies in current U.S. policy toward its Caribbean neighbor: “To begin, I think that the Bush administration left behind an extraordinarily tense relationship between the United States and Cuba, but moreover, I think that the Obama administration has inherited a Cuba policy that’s extremely confused, and that’s not solely do to with president Bush. It has been a confused policy for many, many, years...”

Erikson directly addressed some of these inconsistencies: “We have a policy of trying to break down Castro’s information blockade and trying to get alternative ideas into Cuba, through the use of radio and T.V., yet we deny the average American citizen the ability to travel to Cuba, and that could be just as likely of a vector of information and new ideas as any U.S. government broadcasting installations based in Washington or South Florida.”

“The United States says that it is extremely interested in democracy in Cuba, it wants to see a democratic transition...” continued Erikson. “Well, in fact much of our Cuba policy is actually predicated on the goal of getting compensation for expropriated properties. It’s not clear that democracy and property go hand in hand, or, if indeed property is the wolf hiding in the sheep’s clothing of democracy.”

Erikson concluded by addressing the challenge facing a multilateral U.S. Cuban policy approach given the current economic embargo. “Last October 2008, the United Nation voted, for the seventeenth time in a row, to condemn the U.S. embargo of Cuba in a lop-sided vote of one hundred and eighty five to three... It is going to be very difficult for us to have a multi lateral Cuba policy when no one else agrees with the U.S. embargo.”

Erikson is the author of *“The Cuba Wars: Fidel Castro, the United States, and the Next Revolution,”* which was described by Current History magazine as “the most important book on Cuba in a generation.”

**Jake Colvin**, Vice President for Global Trade Issues at the **National Foreign Trade Council (NFTC)** concluded the forum by addressing the economic implications of the U.S. embargo of Cuba: “The United States places more comprehensive sanctions on Cuba than any other country in the world, and that includes North Korea and Iran... this more broad application of sanctions drives our companies crazy and it drives other countries crazy.”

“But even within this severely restricted setting, the most restrictive in the world...” continued Colvin, “there are plenty of opportunities to engage... The United States did 700 million dollars worth of business, sent 700 million dollars worth of exports, to Cuba last year. All cash sales, all one way.”

Colvin finished by suggesting how the United States should proceed by leveraging the business community. “There is still a lot of work to be done, and to provide exemptions to the embargo on things like building materiel, construction equipment, tractors, things of that nature, would be a way of leveraging the business community in an effort to reach out to the Cuban people.”

Prior to his current position, Colvin directed USA\*Engage, a business coalition established under the Council to promote U.S. diplomacy, trade and humanitarian assistance abroad. He is also a fellow with the New Ideas Fund, where he has recently completed a project on “The Case for a New Cuba Policy.”

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