

**Secretary of Commerce Carlos M. Gutierrez**  
**Remarks to the Heritage Foundation “Cuba at the**  
**Crossroads” Series**  
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([Video](#))

Well thank you Ray. Thank you very much. I should confess first of all, after Dr. Edwards and Dr. Falcoff that my interest has always been one of a lay person, so I am going to try and be good follow-up act to a very engaging and very thought provoking presentation.

I do have to thank the Heritage Foundation for having the foresight to have these discussions on Cuba, and I believe they started several years ago. We're going to find that this has been several years ahead of its time. That at some point in our generation, and very likely at some point during the next administration, Cuba will become a major foreign policy question. I hope that we are strategically ready for it, as opposed to finding ourselves in a position of having to react. There is no question that Cuba will be more and more in the forefront as time goes by.

The first inaugural that I heard here in Washington in my current role was the President's second inaugural address and there is a quote from that that I will always remember that really sticks out he said, *“The survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands. The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world.”* And it is important to recognize that there are still, ironically after the collapse of communism and after the very clear failure of communism as a system, there are still people in Cuba, in North Korea that are still living under a system that clearly does not work. So there's still a lot of work do.

So, the 50th anniversary of the communist rule. It's amazing. It's amazing. I grew up in a family where when we moved from Havana to Miami Beach we thought it was a matter of months, so we went to a hotel and we said look, “let just let time go by

and its just a matter of time before we go back." And then there was the old saying in Miami that "this Christmas would have *lechón* in Cuba." It's just amazing to think that 50 years have gone by.

One of the things I want to talk a little bit about, that I've seen, again as a lay person, who has with a great deal of fascination has studied Cuba have realized that this has been a very personal revolution. It is billed to be an uprising of the masses, but it is very much the work and project of one individual. And the more you know that, the more you will understand Cuba of today.

Before 1959, Cuba had a dynamic economy. Today it is literally in shambles and you have to ask yourself, what for? What is it that justifies the current system?

Cubans live on about 20 dollars per month. They get a ration card. The amazing thing is that the rations that they get don't last for a month. So they are forced then to go out and try and make ends meet. The irony and the terrible shame is that to go out and make ends meet is illegal. So you have to take part in the black market. You have to have petty corruption. You have to take things home from work.

So it is a system that forces people to essentially steal, to take place in the black market, to take part in corrupt activities to be able to survive. They say that Cuba is the only place in the world where a pound has less than 16 ounces, because people will take home an ounce or two of something to be able to make ends meet, as Cubans say in Cuba, to "resolve."

It is important to realize, as we've all learned about entrepreneurship, the importance of small businesses, the importance of small businesses in creating progress, that in Cuba it is literally illegal to create a small business.

So if you want to somehow make ends meet and figure out a way of being able to supplement what you don't get from your ration card and open up a little restaurant coming out of your kitchen, that you can be arrested for that. And the great irony is at a time when there are so called "reforms" in Cuba now, today, there is a crack down like no other on this small black market activity.

Racial inequality in Cuba is rampant and we have to recall that in 1959 this was going to be one of the great achievements of the revolution, to achieve racial

equality. Cuba, of course, being a country where the percent of Afro-Cubans is a lot greater than the percent of Afro-Americans here.

Sixty percent of the population today is afro-Cuban .There are very few, if any, Cubans at the top echelons of the government. I believe there are no Cubans in the political bureau. It is very, very difficult to find Afro-Cubans in slots of power. You will find some, but the proportion is nowhere near 60 percent, and you're talking about 60 percent of the population.

A recent study found that 80 percent of Cubans believe that there's absolutely no chance that an Afro-Cuban could be President. This is a country where one of its great heroes of the past was an Afro-Cuban if you go back over a hundred years. So they've actually gone the other way and have actually gone backward in terms of racial equality and racial progress.

It'll be interesting to see how they deal with the fact that the U.S. will have an Afro-American president, because all along they have been describing Cuba to their people, to Cubans, as describing the U.S. as a place of terrible inequality. If you're a Hispanic and you come to the U.S., forget it, you'll be treated like a second-class citizen. You will not be able to get ahead. You are openly discriminated ... all of the sudden we have an Afro-American President. It'll be fascinating to see how they deal with that, given that with our smaller proportion of African-Americans, we have a President, and with the great majority of Cubans being African-American, there's very, very little progress.

The human rights record of Cuba is—we could spend hours talking about it—it is miserable. I don't think we know yet what it has been like to live in Cuba and one day we will know. The President made a speech a few months ago where he talked about that one day, one day we will be as shocked to find out what has been going on in Cuba as the world was after Stalin's death. Of what was going on in the Soviet Union.

As we all know Cubans can't speak out against the government. You can't read what you want, you can't say what you want, you can't worship as you wish and the tremendous cruelty of the system is that once a political prisoner is put in jail, invariably they get sick because the conditions are awful, and then they are denied medical attention. That is part of the punishment. You talk about cruelty, you talk

about brutality. The people who support Cuba and who support the system one day will be ashamed when they realize what has been going on in those dungeons.

To know Cuba I believe that you need to know Castro. And one thing I have learned is that if you know the history, if you know the individual, then a lot of the tactics, a lot of the actions, a lot of the policies, begin to take hold. My theory—and I'll throw it out as a theory, because we are in an academic circle, and hopefully we can have a great debate—is that Fidel Castro first and foremost is anti-American. He is the ultimate anti-U.S. Without the U.S. he wouldn't have a position, his brand wouldn't be as well positioned as it is.

Marxism has almost become a tactic to be able to cement Cuba as first and foremost an anti-American country.

From the very beginning, he has declared himself an enemy. There are letters going back to his time well before 1959, where he talks about his true destiny, his true role in life is to stand up to the U.S.

So, once you get that and once you understand that, I believe that everything else is a bit clearer in terms of their policies, in terms of what they do, in terms of who their friends are. Many people are wondering, "Why is Cuba so close to Iran?" Well, they're close to Iran because Iran is not close to the U.S., and again, everything they do has to be looked at through the perspective of the U.S., and Castro is the ultimate anti-American, a declared enemy of the U.S.

So, in spite of that the U.S. is Cuba's fifth largest trading partner. We are the number one source of food sales to Cuba. The people of the U.S. are the number one source of humanitarian aid to Cuba—the second source of hard cash after tourism. So that you never hear, that you will never have Castro recognize.

So, I'm often asked the question and since I've been involved in this transition commission with Secretary Rice, I'm often asked the question, "When will the U.S. change its policy toward Cuba?" I think that is the wrong question. The real question is, "When will the Cuban government change its system?" Because, that is at the heart of the problem here. It's not Washington policy that has created the Cuban system. And we have to watch out, and we have to be very careful, and we have to be very guarded about simplistic solutions.

I often hear people say, "Look, the solution here is very simple. Just lift the embargo and you'll find that the thing starts crumbling and starts unraveling and in a matter of six months it will be all over." There is nothing simple about our relationship with Cuba.

And you have to remember that Barack Obama will be the 11<sup>th</sup> President of the U.S. since Castro took power. I think it will be 11 ... I'm starting out with President Eisenhower. And there is a reason why the previous 10 Presidents have had a certain policy or have concluded certain actions and certain policies toward Cuba. And those 10 Presidents have been very different, ideologically, in terms of the political spectrum. Some have been Republican hawks. Others have been liberal Democrats. And they have all tried to deal with Cuba in their own way. And we now have 50 years of a pattern. And I think it would be very worthwhile to study that pattern, especially now as we look to the future.

And I am also asked the question, "Well, has the embargo succeeded?" I'll tell you, my answer is an absolute yes for one simple reason: the embargo has denied an enemy of the U.S. resources. Think about that. You have an enemy 90 miles away from your shores who is a declared enemy who would like nothing more than see the U.S. go away. The best you could do is just make sure that they don't have the resources to do more harm.

When Castro has had resources the Cuban people haven't improved, their lives haven't improved. What has happened is that their military has gotten bigger, more tanks, better planes, more soldiers. They have funded wars in Africa. Funded revolutionary movements in Latin America, but the Cuban people have been standing in line with ration cards for 50 years. Doesn't matter what the resources are in terms of the central government.

Che Guevara, I was reminded by Lino Gutierrez, that Che Guevara famously said we want at least two or three Vietnams in Latin America. So you never get credit for what doesn't happen. But nobody knows what would have happened had someone like Fidel Castro had a lot of resources. If he had the resources of say an Hugo Chavez what would have history been. No one knows that, and we will never know and gladly we will never know.

Look back at some of the big highlights of history: 1962, during the missile crisis, we now know because there a lot more published materials that have been released to the public, that there's a very well known letter that Castro sent Khrushchev saying essentially preemptively we should attack the U.S. So we should not let them undo our revolution. We should have a preemptive strike against the U.S. Think about that: 1962 he had nuclear missiles and his solution is let's go for it. And people are wondering why we don't get close to Cuba, and why don't we try to reason with them.

Probably the President who tried the hardest to reach out and really turn the page on Cuba was President Carter. We had people to people dialogues. He opened an Interests Section in Havana. He really looked at Cuba in perhaps the way President Nixon looked at China. He wanted to turn the page and look forward and have a different relationship with Cuba.

And one of the outcomes of that and one of the ways President Carter was rewarded for reaching out was, you may recall, the Mariel Boat lift. A hundred and twenty five thousand Cubans, that is probably as close to an act of war as you can get. A hundred and twenty five thousand Cubans were just basically sent to the U.S., picked up by boats coming out of Miami and we know today that many of those people who were allowed to leave were released from prison. And what Castro did is send us some of his most ardent, some of his most dangerous criminals that he had in jail he sent to the U.S.

Is that a way of showing someone that you do want to respond in a favorable way to their outreach? Somebody once wrote that that was the U.S.'s reward for reaching out and wanting to negotiate with Fidel Castro who again is the ultimate anti-American. A hundred and twenty five thousand people. That was an act of war.

In the mid 1990s, President Clinton had released, he had eased restrictions on travel and remittances, also looking for a way of maybe turning the page. Cuba responded by another migration crisis but the big move a few days before, actually a week or so, before President Clinton was scheduled and had planned to veto Helms-Burton, Cuba shot down a civilian plane over international waters. That was the Brothers to the Rescue plane. Do you think that is a sign of a country that really wants to ease relationships?

So, those are three or four examples. But you can go back and see that pattern throughout history. So when people simplistically say, "Oh just ease the embargo things will collapse, things will do fine, it's our fault, we have to engage, we have to show them we can be reasonable, it is a lack of knowledge of history and a lack of knowledge of history will get us in a lot of trouble in the future.

Interestingly, President Carter returned to Cuba in 2002, and actually went out and talked to dissidents. And President Carter had a lot to do with putting many of the dissidents on the map. He went out and spoke with dissidents. He spoke in Havana. He spoke very openly about democracy and human rights. And we sometimes don't connect the dots, but it was after President Carter left less than a year later when Castro jailed the 75 dissidents who are well known today in what they called the spring of 2003. Again, a heck of a way of responding to President Carter's second outreach.

So, the pattern is there. We need to understand the pattern. It is so dangerous to not understand history before embarking into the future. We believe that change has to happen in Cuba and I totally agree with what Dr. Falcoff said. This is not about change in the U.S. or us changing something here that will change Cuba. Cubans need to change Cuba and change has to happen in Cuba and the future leader of Cuba I don't think is in Miami or in Washington or in New Jersey, they are probably sitting in a jail in Cuba. But it is all in Cuba and it has to happen in Cuba and it is great to look at some of the personalities that are there.

Instead of talking about 11 million people let's look at the real people who are suffering who we should keep track of:

Dr. Oscar Elias Biscet, an Afro-Cuban. He dared to criticize the regime and he exposed the practice of forced abortions in Cuba. He was sentenced to 25 years in prison. He has been in prison for all but 36 days since 1999. People who are close to him know that he is on the verge of dying. He has lost his teeth. He weighs very little for a man of his height. He is being literally just taken as close as he can to his death as a punishment. Oscar Biscet: a tremendously courageous man.

There is the case of Gorki Aguila. This isn't just about you know boring revolutionaries. We also have rock musicians who are part of the Cuban drama. Here is a musician who has talked about communism and has criticized the regime but he

said something last time he was jailed for something they call "dangerousness." Last time he was jailed, he left jail and he said, "Look there is not a big difference here, the only difference to me is that I have left a small jail and now I am going to a big jail. But Cuba is one jail anyway. " No matter where you are you are always in jail.

Then there is Yoani Sanchez, a tremendously courageous woman, who is a blogger. Lives in Havana. She was named Time Magazine's 100 most influential people of 2008. And two weeks ago the Cuban authorities warned Yoani that her actions have crossed the limits of tolerance and warned against her contact with counter-revolutionary elements. What is her crime? She is blogging. She's talking about life in Cuba. She's using the Internet. You can get a sense of how backwards this place is. The Internet is against the law.

The thing about the Cuban experience is more than Yoani, than Gorki, than Oscar Elias Biscet. It is the countless mothers who have seen their sons die in prison or withering away in prison. My father used to tell me cases about fathers who were forced to watch their son's execution. It just wasn't enough to get rid of your enemies. It's to make the people who stay behind suffer. Wives of men who had been tortured and killed. Daughters ... daughters who are forced to go out and do favors for tourists to make ends meet. Talk about a system that doesn't work.

There are a lot of unmentioned and unnamed Cubans who pay a tremendous price for one person's complexes, for one person's anger, for one person's tremendous resentment against the U.S. A lot of families separated. A lot of dreams killed.

Our goal in our policy has always been freedom, human rights, democracy in Cuba. That is the end game. And it has been to deny resources to someone who we know if they had resources they would use them against U.S. interests. I think that's a very logical policy. It's a very simple policy. It's a policy that has worked. And it's a policy that should stay in place until there is change in Cuba that tells us that we no longer have a sworn enemy 90 miles from our shores. And for me it's as simple as that.

Would you help your enemy? Would you increase the resources of your enemy? How far would you go to help someone whose vision of the world—of a beautiful world—would be the world without the U.S.

A lot of countries have accepted less. A lot of countries have reached out to Cuba. If it isn't the U.S. who wants the political prisoners freed, who is going to point out what is happening, who is left? No one is left. And unless it is the U.S. who continues to stand firm with the Cuban people, then what we will be doing is cementing a dictatorship and legitimizing a dictatorship.

So there will be a post-Fidel world. There will be a post-Raul world. Raul is Fidel without the charisma, without the seven hour speeches. But he has learned from Fidel.

So, as soon as the Cubans are liberated from this policy of resentment, of anger against the U.S. and Cubans are allowed to achieve their potential. Cuba can be one of the most prosperous countries in the world. The talent, the resources are just amazing. Sugar—over eight million tons before the so-called revolution; last year there was one and a half million tons. There is nothing that is being utilized for the good of the country.

Our policy should be the same while Fidel and Raul are there, and if someone is going to succeed them, they need to prove ... they need to prove ... that they are not Raul and Fidel. That they are not a sworn enemy of the U.S. When that day comes they will find they have no better partner than the U.S. Until that day comes, we should not be simplistic. We should not be naïve about what has happened over the last 50 years on our shores.

I thank you for your interest in this topic. I hope we can get a chance to have a discussion with our two distinguished scholars and thank you again.