

The Foreign Policy Association
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Cuba Today and After the Castro Brothers

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Ted Piccone, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution in Washington, DC, outlined events that have occurred in Cuba since the 1959 revolution and what's likely to happen in the future in a talk February 23 before the Foreign Policy Association of Harrisburg. More than 130 members and guests attended.

Piconne said Cuba was turned upside down when Fidel Castro took power, established a Communist regime and allied the island nation with the Soviet Union. President Kennedy tried and failed to overthrow Castro in the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion, which led to a missile crisis and culminated with the United States imposing an economic embargo on Cuba.

For years, Cuba relied economically on the Soviet Union but after its collapse in 1989, Cuba's economy dropped by 30 percent. Many in the U.S. saw this as the moment to tighten the screws and topple the regime, but that didn't happen, Piconne noted.

In 1996, the Cuban air force downed two leaflet-dropping planes piloted by a Miami-based group seeking to overthrow Castro. Congress passed the Helms-Burton Act, preventing the embargo from being lifted until Cuba held free and fair elections, freed political prisoners, and allowed for a free press and trade unions.

President George W. Bush renewed efforts to bring about the Castro regime's collapse by funding a \$20 million program of airing anti-Castro TV and radio broadcasts into Cuba, but again with no noticeable effect.

In 2008, suffering from declining health, Fidel Castro handed over power to his brother Raul. Fidel died last November 25.

During his presidency, Barack Obama adopted measures to relax the embargo. Progress was slow, but on December 17, 2014, Obama announced an exchange of prisoners and the establishment of limited diplomatic relations between the two countries.

Raul Castro has announced he would step down in 2018 and turn over the government to Miguel Diaz-Canel.

While the U.S. may never achieve a normal relationship with Cuba, it is necessary to have a constructive engagement with the country, located just 90 miles from Florida, Piconne said. It is evident from the past 50 years that continuing a punitive embargo will not move U.S. - Cuban relations forward.

2017 Program Topics / Schedule

March 23 Russia and the West

April 27 South China Sea Geopolitics

(Please note the switch between the March and April topics.)

May 10 Bus trip to the Polish Embassy and the U.S. State Department in Washington, DC

May 18 Future of U.S. - Iranian Relations

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