



**Women's Foreign Policy Group
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**The Cuba Wars:
Fidel Castro, the United States, and the Next Revolution**

Peggy Blumenthal: I'm Peggy Blumenthal. I'm Chief Operating Officer here at the Institute of International Education and I'm delighted to welcome you all. Some of you have been here many times, some of you work here and are colleagues, and others of you are new and particularly drawn by this exciting topic, which of course is the US-Cuba relationship. Most of you know IIE for the work it does with the State Department, administering the Fulbright program and various other programs. We also do some work involving Cubans, I think, to work with the Ford Foundation, although there's none with the New York government now, but that may change!

And then of course we also work very closely with [WFPG President] Pat Ellis on hosting you here for the Women's Foreign Policy Group. It's such an exciting set of speakers, and we're looking forward to a speaker who Pat will introduce.

Patricia Ellis: Peggy, thank you so much again for your warm hospitality. We have a great partnership. We love coming back here, and it's a great place to have a meeting, because it really is intimate and gives us a chance to really have a good discussion after we hear the speaker, and we're just very pleased about our partnership. I want to formally welcome everyone on behalf of the Women's Foreign Policy Group. I'm Patricia Ellis, I'm the president. Most of you know, but for those who don't know us, we promote global engagement, women's voices, and women's leadership on pressing international issues of the day.

One of our most popular series is our Author Series and we were just thrilled that Dan Erickson of the Inter-American Dialogue could join us here today, because he just has a new book out; it's the 50th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution, so it's really, really very exciting. I'm glad to see so many IIE colleagues here today, because we're co-sponsoring and will continue to do that. We also have some diplomatic colleagues here and here's one, the Austrian Consul General, and lots and lots of other friends. Just in terms of what's going on with the WFPG, this is our first Author Series program this year. We'll be working on a number of others.

Next week we have our mentoring fair, and we're still recruiting mentors, so if anyone's available it's a really wonderful evening, and we sit there at tables. It's not a job fair. We counsel

students. They're so grateful just to be able to hear about career pathways, to get advice on various decisions and questions people have, so anyone who might be interested or available we have some flyers out there; you can speak to us after the program.

We also hope to be doing a Celebration of Women Diplomats which we have done before in the past, and I also want to remind you that every May we have our UN Study Visit which is really a fantastic event. We have briefings by top UN and US officials. Every year it's different depending on whatever the pressing issues are. It could be climate change, peacekeeping, anything. Last year our luncheon speaker was the Deputy Secretary General.

So it's now my privilege to introduce Dan Erickson. He's Senior Associate for US Policy, also Director of the Caribbean Program at the Inter-American Dialogue. He's based in Washington, DC. He's the author of a new book which I hope you will buy and get signed after the program, *The Cuba Wars: Fidel Castro, the United States, and the Next Revolution*. In his book – it came out at the end of last year, November – he was talking about the intersection of policy and politics in an election year and then also looking ahead, to what might happen, the \$64,000 question, “What happens after Fidel is no longer on the scene?” On a daily basis he analyzes US-Cuba relations in a broader context, US relations with Latin America with a big focus on the Caribbean. Before he came to the Inter-American Dialogue he worked at Harvard Business School; he was a research associate there; he was a Fulbright scholar in US-Mexican business relations. He's widely published – *Washington Post*, *LA Times*, and many academic journals. He also co-edited *Transforming Socialist Economies: Lessons from Cuba and Beyond* and I'm sure that many of you have also heard him on the radio or seen him on TV. So please join me in welcoming Dan Erickson.

Daniel Erikson: Great, well thank you. It's a real pleasure for me to be here today. I certainly want to thank Peggy Blumenthal and Pat Ellis for helping me set this up, as well as Kimberly Kahnhauser. It was a colleague of mine in Washington actually, Michelle Manatt, who mentioned to me that it would be useful to connect with the Women's Foreign Policy Group and there is this Author Series. And so I'm thrilled to be one of the first ones this year but I hope there are many more and that I receive invitations to them. Some I'm sure are going to be more interesting than this.

Just to begin with, I'm going to talk a bit today about the book that I wrote, *The Cuba Wars: Fidel Castro, the United States, and the Next Revolution*. This came out just a couple of months ago and it's really an effort to focus in a very intense fashion on the US-Cuba relationship over the last five or six years and be very contemporary about it. So while there is history about this, there's a little bit on the Cuban Missile Crisis, there's a little bit on the Bay of Pigs, Che Guevara, this book is not about those things or those events, this is a book that's set very much in real time. It tries to follow the politics in the United States over Cuba policy as well as the contemporary events taking place in Cuba. The reason I wrote the book is that I simply find Cuba to be one of the most fascinating and complex issues in US foreign policy anywhere and certainly in US foreign policy toward Latin America.

Cuba, I expect I won't have to remind any of you, is that island just 90 miles off the coast of Florida. It's the largest island in the Caribbean, home to 11 million people. It's governed by the

communist regime that was founded and created by Fidel Castro in 1959. Fidel burst to power at the tender age of 32 and went on to hold it for 49 more years until he retired as president last year at the age of 81.

Shortly following the Cuban Revolution, Cuba moved to nationalize a lot of US private property and also drove more than one million Cubans into exile, and at the height of the Cold War, the United States implemented a comprehensive trade and investment embargo on Cuba, as well as broke off diplomatic relations with the island, and instituted a travel ban on the ability of US citizens to travel to Cuba, and that – or better said – the rest is history. Really, in many ways the US-Cuba relationship remains stuck at that moment in time, more than 45 years ago, when the US and Cuba intersected in a confrontation as part of the Cold War.

For most Americans, Cuba is simply a country that we don't trade with, we can't travel to, and that many people do not think about much at all. People ask me how I got interested in Cuba. I've spent some time in Latin America: I've lived in Mexico; I've lived in Chile and have worked on Latin American issues in the last couple of years. I first traveled to Cuba in spring of 2000 at the height of the Elian Gonzalez crisis. Some of you may remember Elian Gonzalez: he was a five, six year-old boy who was picked up off the shores of Florida, handed over to distant relatives in Miami, who subsequently refused to give him back to his father who still lived in Cuba. At the time the US and Cuba were coming to a resolution – although it was not a particularly pretty one – of the Elian Gonzalez dispute, where Elian was going to be returned to his father in Cuba, there was a movement in Congress to liberalize some US trade with Cuba and allow some more agricultural trade and it seemed to me that there might be potential for some reconciliation in the US-Cuban relationship.

I got very interested in that process and when I joined my current institution in 2001, I worked on US-Cuban issues to see if there was something we could do from an NGO perspective to help facilitate reconciliation between the US and Cuba. At that time, seven or eight years ago, I thought, “Well, you know, there might be a book in this.” And indeed there was, but the book that I wrote was not the one I thought I would write. This is not a book about reconciliation; this is a book about conflict, and it's a book about how the United States and Cuba continue to clash over a variety of issues.

Now, Cuba evokes extreme passions on both the Left and the Right. There are those who see Cuba as representing an alternative model of social development, and there are those who argue that Fidel Castro is one of the most brutal tyrants ever to walk the earth. Then there's the question of the US embargo of Cuba. This is a policy that remains beloved by many in Miami, although I would argue fewer by the day. It's basically tolerated by US policy makers in Washington, and it's a policy that's ridiculed and disliked in the rest of the world.

In my travels back to Cuba, I've met people who have been there many times and who know the island extremely well. I've been told from time to time that Cuba is, at the end of the day, a small issue for the United States – a small foreign policy issue. I actually dispute that in the book. I say actually that it's an extremely important issue both for US interests abroad as well as for the image of the United States in the world.

But even if one were to concede that Cuba may be a small issue, I would argue that the questions raised by Cuba are not small questions. They deal with topics such as democracy and human rights, communism and capitalism, and the intersection between domestic politics and foreign policy. Cuba, to me, raises questions like: To what degree does the United States have the right, responsibility, or the capacity to try to break down authoritarian regimes and replace them with democracies? Should American citizens be compelled to give up our right to travel to certain countries in the service of the foreign policy imperatives of our government? Should broader world opinion matter at all in US foreign policy decisions? Is engaging with a government that we don't like a concession? How do our own domestic politics shape the way the US acts in the world? And perhaps the most relevant question: When it comes to US foreign policy, is inertia, in fact, the most powerful force of all?

Authors often have a quote at the beginning of their books. I didn't have a quote in the beginning of this one. But if I had selected a quote, I would have chosen a line from a poem by William Blake where he says, "to see the world in a grain of sand," because when you look at the US-Cuban relationship you have this potent concoction of high ideals and crack politics, moral absolutes and moral compromises, comedy, tragedy, the sublime, the profane, and the just plain zany playing out between the cities of Washington, Miami, and Havana, with a cast of characters that is something like a combination of the magical realism of a Gabriel Garcia Marquez novel and the cloak and dagger action of a John le Carré spy thriller with some Karl Rove politics tossed in for good measure.

Moreover there are several reasons that now is an especially good time to start a conversation on Cuba. January 1, 2009, marked the 50th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution when Fidel Castro first came into power. It's a moment of leadership transition. In February 2008, just about a year ago, after 49 long years in power, Fidel Castro retired. He is now the ex-president of Cuba and [has] elevated his younger brother, Raul Castro, to the presidency. Cuba is being headed by Raul together with the collective leadership. And of course we have the leadership transition occurring here in the United States with the election of Barack Obama as the 44th US President. As a candidate, he made engaging America's adversaries a central plank of his foreign policy platform. Clearly, we're entering a new stage in US-Cuban relations. The question is: Will this new stage look any different than any of the previous stages that we've seen in the past 50 years?

This book really focuses on contemporary issues. I interviewed more than 50 people engaged in US-Cuban affairs including exiles, dissidents, people in the US Congress, members of the US State Department. I really tried to capture a wide range of perspectives on Cuba. I also think that this book is the first post-9/11 book on US-Cuba policy where it really looked at both how the United States is trying to confront what is deemed to be state sponsors of terror – and Cuba by the way is on that list, the only Latin American country identified as such by the US State Department – and also pushes claims to try to free the world from tyranny. I also looked at the changing political dynamics in the Cuban-American community, cultural issues, and issues such as the use of the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base or the rise of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela.

The title, *The Cuba Wars*, refers both to the conflict between the United States and Cuba as well as the conflict within the United States over what our Cuba policy should be – specifically around the US embargo. Fidel Castro and the United States are obviously the two great

adversaries who have been eyeing each other suspiciously across the Florida Straits for the past 50 years, and then the next revolution that I describe is the revolution of expectations unfolding in Cuba due to the leadership transition that's taken place there as well as heightened expectations for a change in US policy with Barack Obama at the helm of the US government.

Just briefly, I want to discuss a little bit about what's taking place in Cuba today. As I said, Fidel Castro resigned from the presidency about a year ago, leaving his younger brother Raul Castro in charge. Prior to becoming president, Raul Castro actually held the curious record of being the longest-serving minister of defense in the world, a position he held for 49 years before his recent promotion. Raul is no spring chicken himself at the age of 77, and when he was elevated to the presidency, he actually selected a number two person, Jose Ramon Machado Ventura, who is even older than he is at the age of 78, so you can't quite say that there's a youth revolution unfolding at the top levels of the Cuban government quite yet.

Nevertheless, Raul Castro does have a different style than Fidel. He relies less on charisma and more on pragmatism. He's made a series of economic reforms during his first year in office: expanding the access of Cubans to certain consumer goods, opening up the agricultural sector in Cuba to some market reforms, allowing some limited, greater self-employment as well. Raul Castro has said that he's interested in trying to boost Cuba's economic efficiency, but under the rubric of the Communist Party. He said at one point: "You know, socialism is no longer convenient; we need to look at alternative methods for boosting production." What you see is basically experimentation taking place in the economic sector. It has been delayed somewhat by three very powerful hurricanes that struck Cuba earlier this year, but nevertheless I expect further changes to take place. In the second half of this year Cuba will actually hold its party congress of the Communist Party which is also an opportunity to set policy and make certain leadership changes.

Another interesting thing about Cuba under Raul Castro is its foreign policy outreach has been truly impressive. It's almost hard to name a president or prime minister of a world power that has not been in Cuba in the last two years. Certainly, there have been high level visits from the President of Russia, the President of China, the President of Brazil, a range of presidents in Latin America including Michelle Bachelet of Chile, Christina Fernandez of Argentina, and many visits by African heads of state, as well. There's a true reaching out to Cuba that's taking place across the spectrum, even among some blocks of countries such as the European Union, which really got into a dispute over democracy and human rights in Cuba following Cuba's arrest of 75 political prisoners in 2003. But the EU has also jump-started a policy dialogue with the Cuban government quite recently.

Now of course, there's one country that's not engaged in these conversations. That happens to be the United States. The Cold War is alive and well with respect to Cuba, despite the fact that the Soviet Union collapsed 17 years ago in December of 1991. Of course there's one major loophole in the trade sanctions the US holds on Cuba which is in agricultural trade, and the trade has been booming in recent years. In 2007, the US was Cuba's fifth largest trade partner, based on all-cash, one-way agricultural sales from the United States to Cuba.

There have been, unfortunately, I think, some analytic issues as it relates to the US policy towards Cuba and the big one – and it was quite relevant under the Bush Administration – is that US policy has been waiting for some time for Fidel Castro to die but more broadly for what has been described as the “poof moment.” The poof moment is that moment when the Cuban government, the Castro regime, goes poof and is replaced by a democratic, pro-free market government that wants normal relations with the United States. Well, that has basically been Plan A: waiting for, and planning for, and responding to the poof. The problem would be that for the United States today, is there has been no poof. In fact there has been a smooth communist succession in Cuba, and so the time has really come for the United States to develop a plan B and react to this new reality on the ground, because whatever should happen with Fidel Castro’s health – whether he will live another month, another year, another decade, another century – to some degree it’s not that relevant a question anymore, because he’s no longer president of the country. Someone else is.

Now, the Bush Administration has one great innovation on Cuba policy which was the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba. This is a 423-page report. It was chaired by former Secretary of State Colin Powell and released in 2004. It’s actually the longest single document that the Bush Administration put out on any topic related to Latin America during its eight years in power. Now, I’m probably one of the few people who have read the report, all 423 pages, and when you read this report it talks about how the US will hasten the transition in Cuba. It will come in, it will help pave the roads, rebuild the institutions of a free market economy, train the police, work with Cuban fisheries, teach English as a second language. And this report actually evoked what was known as Colin Powell’s “Pottery Barn rule” regarding Iraq: if you break it, you own it. US policy has been focused on trying to break the Cuban government and rebuild it more or less around the image the US would like to have for it.

Clearly this is not about to occur, and there’s one line in the report which I found particularly amusing, which said that the United States, following the Cuban transition, would rush in to Cuba and vaccinate all the children under the age of five. Well, Cuba has its problems, and it even actually has its problems in its health system, but one problem it does not have is its vaccination rate. Cuba actually has one the best vaccination rates of any country in the developing world. It wasn’t so long ago when I was in Havana, and I saw a billboard alongside one of the streets, and there was a group of Cuba children playing underneath the sign that said, “*Gracias, Señor Bush, pero ya estamos vacunados.*” “Thank you Mr. Bush, but we’re already vaccinated.” I think that the United States needs to recognize those realities – the social reality in Cuba as well – and that there are many paths and things that Cubans are perfectly competent to manage themselves without assistance from the US.

Now Karl Rove, who used to be President Bush’s top political advisor, had a saying, when it came to Cuba. He said, “You know, when people mention Cuba to me, it makes me think of three things: Florida, Florida, and Florida.” So, it’s impossible to discuss US-Cuba relations without looking at Florida and the changing political dynamic there. Florida, of course, is not only a very important state in presidential elections, it’s actually the 4th largest state in terms of electoral votes – 27 electoral votes – but it’s also the first largest state that can clearly be a swing state. In other words, you have a presidential election: California goes to the Democrats, Texas goes to the Republicans, New York goes to the Democrats, and then you get to Florida. Anyone

can win it, and the Cuban-American vote is about five percent of the Florida electorate. Therefore, what they say matters a great deal, not just for Florida politics but for US national politics.

Now there have been any number of polls of the Cuban-American community that say that the opinions of Cuban-Americans are changing. They have been polled to say they would favor more dialogue with Cuba, more travel with Cuba, more trade with Cuba, et cetera, et cetera. And these polls may in fact be accurate, but they still have not manifested in a significant way at the political level. In the November 2008 election, while Barack Obama did win a majority of Cuban-Americans under the age of 30 – a slight majority – of the overall Cuban-American vote, just about two-thirds went for John McCain. There were three Cuban-American legislators who were very pro-embargo and anti-Castro. It was thought that they were running competitively. All three were re-elected: two of them in extremely easy victories and a third was re-elected by a six point margin, which is still a relatively healthy victory when you have a popular Democratic candidate and a Republican party that's imploding, frankly, in many other districts across the United States.

One fellow who I interviewed for the book, who actually runs the Cuban-American Political Action Committee that pumped out around \$750,000 in the congressional races in order to win support for continuing the embargo in Congress, said to me when I spoke to him, "You know the moderate Cuban-American is the unicorn that never appeared. Every election people say 'Well has Miami changed? Is there a different view? Are they going to reject the embargo?' And it's never happened." Now you could argue that the unicorn appeared slightly through the polling data, but clearly it was not sufficient to really demonstrate the debate is moving forward that rapidly in that community.

One of my first book events was in Miami, at the Miami International Book Fair. I gave a talk much like I'm giving now, perhaps a little too – for my audience at that time, I don't know the audience here – a little too unvarnished in my criticism of current US policy. And afterwards a lot of Cuban-Americans – young, old, middle-aged – came up to me afterwards, not to buy my book, but to argue with me about the embargo. And they asked me, "Well, do you believe that if the US lifts the embargo on Cuba, Fidel will make Cuba into a democracy?" and I said, "There's no way to answer that question. I would say no, probably not, but it could set into place certain positive policies that would be good for the US and good for Cuba." And I said to my interrogators, "Well, let me turn this around and ask you, 'Do you believe if we maintain the US embargo of Cuba, that that will lead Cuba to being a democracy?'" And the response I received was, "No, but that's not the point." I think that for many Cuban-Americans today that support the policy, they do so not because they believe that it will lead to the objective of democracy in Cuba, but because the embargo to them remains a symbolic repudiation of the Castro regime, and that is something that still has value irrespective of what the policy achieves.

Moving from the local to the international – and I don't think I need to probably say this at the UN Plaza – but there's really not many other countries in the world that think much of the US embargo of Cuba. In fact, last October, the United Nations voted for the 17th time to condemn the US embargo of Cuba in a lopsided vote of 185 to three. 185 countries voted to condemn the US embargo. Only the US, Israel, and Palau voted to maintain support for the embargo. The

United States mysteriously lost the support of the Marshall Islands, which had actually voted with us in 2007, but in 2008, abstained. And so I think that when you look at the United States moving forward and saying that we want a multilateral policy and to work a lot with Latin America or with Europe, well the US says, “Can’t we all work together on Cuba?” It’s very, very hard for the US to multilateralize its Cuba policy when the rest of the world can’t stand it.

Then if you come to the US Congress, I frankly – and some people disagree – I see the US Congress still being basically paralyzed on Cuba policy. That there’s bipartisan support for maintaining the embargo, bipartisan opposition that’s moving to lift the embargo; there’s a new bill out very recently that’s calling for lifting the travel ban. But still, so many bills never quite make it through into law. We still have the Helms-Burton [Act] on the books from 1996, the Cuban Democracy Act from 1992. We have a very proactive Cuban-American lobby, which I described. 60% of their donations went to Democrats actually in the last election cycle, and so I think that if you’re looking for the US Congress to really mobilize on Cuba policy, you’re probably going to have a long wait, which brings us back to the former junior senator from Illinois and current president, Barack Obama.

Obama said two interesting things about Cuba policy during the election campaign, maybe three, but I’ll start with two that were, perhaps more interesting. One was that he said he would lift restrictions on the ability of Cuban-Americans to travel to Cuba or to send remittances to their families in Cuba. And the second is that he would like to engage in some type of dialogue with the Cuban government, although how that codified changed a little bit over time. And then third, he did take the trouble to fly down to Miami and say, “I will maintain the embargo,” to an influential group of Cuban-Americans. So what Obama has proposed are basically very modest changes to the policy – mainly where there are areas of greater consensus – which is that many Cuban-Americans, even, believe that they should have more rights to travel, even if they don’t favor lifting the US travel ban as a whole. And I think that Obama is probably going to proceed with a cautious policy to begin with. The dialogue has attracted a lot of attention. What type of dialogue would exist between Cuba and the United States in the future? In a speech, Obama said that he would engage in dialogue with the Cubans “at a time and place of my choosing and which benefits the US national interest and the cause of freedom for the Cuban people.” That reminds me a little bit of that *New Yorker* cartoon where there are two executives who are trying to schedule time for lunch, and one of them is on the phone and he says, “Well for me, Thursday is out. How’s never? Is never good for you?” And I feel like when you look at Barack Obama and Raul Castro and their supposed meeting, I can see each of them saying, “How’s never? Is never good for you?” And that might be a pretty convenient time for both of them.

Another issue that has been in the news a lot lately has surrounded Guantanamo Bay and the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base. Guantanamo, of course, has become famous more recently because of the Bush Administration’s decision to put, basically, suspected terrorist operatives there beginning in January of 2002, and around 800 or 900 people spent time in detention centers since then. Most have kind of left and not been prosecuted. There was one former kangaroo skinner from Australia that got nine months. I think Bin Laden’s driver got, similarly, a very short sentence. In any case, now Obama said he’s going to close Guantanamo – the detention facility anyway – and I think that’s probably good news; it’s certainly welcome in Latin America; it’s welcome in Cuba, but there’s very little discussion of the United States closing the

Guantanamo Bay Naval Base. That has been in US control for about a century. The lease was renegotiated in the 1930s, where the United States now pays Cuba \$4,085 a year to lease the base. And since Fidel Castro came into power in 1959, he refused to cash the checks, which means, every year the US Treasury Department writes a check for \$4,085 and its delivered via our diplomatic mission in Cuba to the Cuban government and Fidel Castro has been reported by some lucky foreign visitors to open his desk drawer and rifle through 50 years of checks, fuming in indignation.

I went to Guantanamo as I was writing the book, and Guantanamo is actually one of the few areas where the US and Cubans do engage in dialogue. There are monthly meetings that were set up in the mid-1990s along the fence line. Every month Cuban military meet with American military along the fence line at the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base. It's an interesting place to visit. It's the only McDonalds that I was able to find in Cuba. The only Spanish spoken is by the Puerto Rican National Guard. Although there are foreign contract workers there, they're from Jamaica and the Philippines. There's a local obsession with rock iguanas and banana rats which are two of the local wildlife.

Before I went to Guantanamo, my most vivid image of it was from the 1992 movie *A Few Good Men*. I don't know if any of you have seen this. It stars Tom Cruise as a young Navy lawyer who is investigating the possibility that Jack Nicholson, who is the commander of the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base, somehow allowed a crime to be committed against a Marine at the Guantanamo Base. And there's this very dramatic scene at the end of the movie where Tom Cruise has turned from the courtroom to Jack Nicholson and says, "I want the truth!" And Jack Nicholson responds, "You want the truth? You can't handle the truth! You want me on that wall. You need me on that wall!" So when I went down to Guantanamo, one of the first things I looked for was that wall. There's actually no wall. And there's actually no wall separating the US from Guantanamo: there's a fence. And if I could, I just want to read a very sort section of my visit to the fence line.

"The 'fence line' is the catchall term for the perimeter of the US Naval Base which is surrounded by a no-man's land that is technically under Cuban control. My visit to the northeast gate to Cuba revealed a sleepy, bucolic vista of green fields and sloping mountains marked by a simple metal fence. According to my serious young Marine chaperone, Staff Sergeant Caba Wooley, the scene was not always so calm. In the 1950s, during the Cuban Revolution, Raul Castro's forces captured a couple dozen US soldiers and held them hostage for several weeks before returning them unharmed. Since then Americans have been banned from leaving the base and entering Cuba, but the two sides continued sparring in the ensuing decades. About 50 Marines used to bunk in a small guard shack, but Cuban soldiers would sneak close to the fence and toss rocks onto the tin roof to keep the soldiers up all night. The Marines responded by elevating a portion of the fence line to a height of more than 40 feet, but the Cubans scaled the fence to hang wind chimes that were even more annoying. When the Cubans shone a spotlight on the Marine barracks to make it even harder to sleep, the soldiers painted a massive Marine seal for the Cubans to light up each night. The Cubans stopped shining the spotlight, but the Marines decided to illuminate the seal themselves every night to show the Cuban Army that the Marines will always be here to protect the base, Wooley boasted. Fierce competition then erupted over which side's flag flew the highest. The United States won the battle by constructing the tallest flagpole,

but the Cubans won the war. They erected their flag on a distant hillcrest where it fluttered triumphantly, barely distinguishable amid the trees.”

Now the US and Cuba, as I said, have these monthly fence-side meetings there, and one of the things that they do is a drill, and let me just read a short section.

“Despite the deep political tensions between their governments, the American and Cuban soldiers on either side of the fence line have apparently concluded that ‘good fences make good neighbors.’ Once a year US and Cuban forces even put together an exercise drill where 150 soldiers from each side practice responding to a major accident along the fence line. At the conclusion of his tour of the fence line, Staff Sergeant Wooley pointed to an open area near the gate. ‘In between these two fences right here, we act as if a bus has crashed and there’s a whole bunch of casualties. Our Corpsmen meet up with their Corpsmen and prepare for it. It’s all scripted, and everybody knows exactly what’s going on – no surprises. The Marines that participate in it told me they just laid there. I mean, they just fake wounds and stuff like that. Then the Cuban Corpsmen act together and they pretty much fix whatever’s going on.’ Even the US Marines, it seems, get a taste of Cuban health care.”

Now, I think this is lovely, that the US and Cuban military have this dialogue and discuss at the side of the base. It seems to me now is the time to really expand that dialogue among the governments and societies of the United States and Cuba. Fidel Castro once told a top US official, “I know exactly what US policy is. It is to wait for me to die, and I do not intend to comply.” Well, George W. Bush just joined Dwight D. Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Baines Johnson, Richard M. Nixon, Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton to be the tenth US president outlasted by Castro in Cuba. Barack Obama is the 11th US president to confront a Castro at the helm of Cuba, although this time Raul. And Obama is the first US president who was not even born when the Castro government first took power in 1959. In fact, Obama was just a twinkle in his mother’s eye when Dwight D. Eisenhower first put the US sanctions on Cuba in 1960: Obama was born in 1961.

In Cuba, 70% of all people living on the island were also born after Fidel Castro came to power. I think there’s a generational transition unfolding both in the United States and in Cuba – and which I describe as the next revolution in the book – which heralds some hope that the future will look a little bit different from the present. There’s a saying that the US always does the right thing after it’s exhausted every available alternative. And now, I don’t know if we’ve exhausted every alternative with respect to Cuba, but of course, there’s been 50 years of estrangement, sanctions, isolation, and, of course, the occasional exploding cigar. The US has tried a lot with respect to Cuba, and I think if we did decide to engage, there would be plenty to talk about.

So I will just end my opening remarks there. I look forward to your questions.

Ms. Ellis: I’m going to open it up. You said maybe there’s a possibility with the next generation. I’m wondering what impact you think that the corporate community and farmers, et cetera, who are chomping at the bit to get into Cuba, can have. I mean, you say that nothing is going to happen in Congress; you don’t expect too much to come out of the executive branch, so are there

any openings? These businessmen go down there, and they're going back. I read North Dakota is sending another big delegation, because Castro – I forgot when – but he can buy crops for cash, and even though it's not a huge market, but maybe in this time of global financial crisis there will be even more pressure, and I'm just wondering if that segment of society might have any clout. And also, are there – if you're talking about the youth – are there any dialogues going on the way, like in the Middle East, where they bring together people from opposing sides, who, you know, whose parents are fighting, but they bring the kids together. I'm just wondering, is there anything going on at that level where youth are able to talk across, from Miami to Havana?

Mr. Erikson: On the private sector: the business treaties have a very special place in Cuba policy. It's called "Missing in Action." Really, ever since 1959, there's been any number of attempts to get the US business community involved in trying to somehow push for normalization of ties between the US and Cuba. The one area that really kind of took off was agriculture, and this was in the year 2000. It was kind of a funny moment in time, because you had what I've described as Elian Gonzalez meets the China syndrome: that in the spring of 2000, there's this huge uproar about Elian Gonzalez; we can't send him back to Cuba, because it's a communist gulag. We have obviously this embargo, the isolation. And Congress – seven bills actually went before Congress at that time, in 2000, related to Elian: to make him a naturalized citizen, to supersede family court rules, and so forth. Then at that same moment, the Clinton Administration and the Republican leadership in Congress were busy pushing through permanent, normal trading relations with China. So, a lot of Republicans were saying, "What do you mean that we can't trade with Cuba, but you're twisting my arm about China?" And that created a split in the Republican caucus and shortly thereafter you had the Trade Sanctions Reform Act, as it is known, that allowed all-cash, agricultural sales from the US to Cuba. And Fidel Castro initially responded and said he wouldn't buy one grain of rice under this legislation, because he didn't like the all-cash provisions; there was no financing; Cuba couldn't sell to the United States, obviously.

Then, in 2001, Cuba was struck by a hurricane, and the US offered humanitarian food aid and the Cubans said, "Hey, you know what, we'll actually buy it, if we're allowed to." And the food trade began. Since then, there has been more than \$2 billion of goods from the US to Cuba. As I said, in 2007, we were Cuba's fifth largest trading partner. Cuba, as an agricultural export market, has jumped up from, I think it was around 185, 185th largest – i.e. no trade – to about our 25th largest export market for agricultural goods. So there's a lot there, and a lot of people thought at this time, with the agri-business – and we're talking Archer Daniels Midland, Cargill, local producers, but some pretty serious producers engaged – that this would have a spillover effect to the larger business community, and there would be more interest in trade with Cuba, and you know, it just never really materialized. You have travel agents who have been very active on this; you have a lot of lobbying from universities and educational groups; there's the Catholic Church and certain religious groups that are very active, but you don't have, you know, name brand, Fortune 500 companies who are really kind of coming in and pushing this, although there's renewed interest.

One of the issues with the Bush Administration was people knew it would go nowhere – and you can also burn political capital and achieve nothing, which no one likes to do, particularly businesses with expensive lobbyists in Washington. And I think that political equation has

changed. Now, if you're pushing with Obama, you're not going to burn that much political capital with the Obama Administration. You might even get something out of it. And so you could have, I think, a bigger impact in the future. One of the people I interviewed for the book was Tom Donahue, who was the president of the US Chamber of Commerce, who went down to Cuba in 1999 on a business trip. And the Chamber of Commerce has been a very strong advocate against the sanctions on Cuba. Although I would say, not quite that strong when it comes to Gutierrez, the US Secretary of Commerce, who is a Cuban-American, who was the CEO of Kellogg, and I presume had very sophisticated views on Cuba before he went into government but was subsequently purged of those views and was very much, I think, a mouthpiece for the party line.

And then on the question of youth, you know, there are some things being done. There's actually an interesting group of young Cuban-American students, university students, in the States, that created a group called *Raíces de Esperanza*, Roots of Hope, in an effort to kind of – basically to find out more about their Cuban identity, establish linkages to groups back on the island. This has been in place for five or six years now; it's run by people who are in their 20s or teenagers, and they initially focused their efforts on trying to engage the young opposition groups – young dissidents or children dissidents, et cetera, in Cuba, which is still a politically correct mode of engagement for Miami. But now they're looking to broaden that, so there are some activities taking place there, but there will be a lot more.

Ms. Ellis: So let's take some other questions. I'm going to take a few together, if that's okay with you.

Question: I was wondering if you could talk about the generational transition that appears to have formed on the US side, but I think ultimately all stems from the Cuban side. Meaning the Cubans that are Cuban-Americans and were born here, et cetera, et cetera... And how much do you think that the policies in Washington have to do really and truly with the influence of the old guard, or is it true that they themselves need to move on for fear of nostalgia... and with the political powers they have had in Florida and Miami – you talked about senators, et cetera, et cetera. A lot of the people [inaudible] will have to admit to being Cuban, [and this] elitist political power that they have.

Question: One of the [new] projects I understand is that Raul will allow Cubans to buy air conditioning equipment. Could you help us understand, behind some of these ideas that Raul has, he may be hoping that companies from other countries will build new facilities and plants, assist in job creation and professional development in Cuba, and can you just remind us what the population is of Cuba?

Mr. Erikson: 11 million.

Question: [Inaudible comment recounting a travel experience in Cuba leading into a question about the travel ban as the first step to normalizing relations and encouraging trade.]

Mr. Erikson: Well, on the first question on the generational transition in Miami, there clearly is one taking place. If you look at the founding generation of Cuban exiles, these are people who

basically pulled up their lives root and branch, to move with their entire families over to South Florida and really only expected to be there a couple years until the Castro regime fell apart in the early 1960s, and of course the regime never did fall apart. They ended up making their new lives here, and they really evolved: they built modern Miami and it evolved into a financial powerhouse and a political powerhouse.

What you see today, I think, is that there are multiple generational transitions taking place. One is this question of the founding generation of exiles, who have kids who are Americans, who have never been to Cuba or are [not] interested necessarily in the issues. Some of these kids adopt a very pro-embargo stance anyway, and certainly, some of the people I've mentioned, who I spoke with in Miami in their 20s were challenging me on the embargo, but others really don't; they have a much more modern view, and those are the people who voted – under 30 years old – a majority for Obama in the last election. Then you have different waves of immigrants. You have this group of people who came over in the 1960s, but then you have people who came over in the 1980s, in the 1990s when we were giving more visas, and these are Cubans who have grown up under Communism, have families back on the island, and have a much more nuanced view of the Cuban reality. And these are the people, I think, that are really being measured in polls that tilt the balance towards greater engagement with Cuba when you ask those questions.

Still, though, I have a very difficult time finding any elected Cuban-American in a position of any authority in Florida state politics or national US politics that is anything but pro-embargo. So that generational transition, while it occurred and continues to occur, hasn't manifested itself on the political level, and there are two Cuban-American senators. Since Salazar left, they are they only two Latinos in Congress. You've got four members of the House of Representatives and they're all very pro-embargo and they fight for it.

On the question of the A/C and the cell phones and what do Cubans expect: when Raul Castro said he was going to allow private citizens to have cell phones, then they rolled out a multi-year plan, it was actually cell phones in 2008, I think air conditioning in 2009, and toasters in 2010. And you'd say, "Okay, it's 2010 and a private Cuban citizen can't even buy a toaster?" The reason the government gave was energy supply. There were concerned about the weakness of the electrical grid and what happens if you overburden it. Maybe this is the real reason, maybe it's not. I'm not an electrical grid expert; I can't really say.

I think that in terms of infrastructure though, what Cuba looks for are groups that it can trust ideologically. I mean, its top two trading partners right now are Venezuela, under Hugo Chavez, and China. The European Union is still very engaged, and collectively the EU is probably the biggest, but the biggest single country would be Spain. You have Canada; Russia is also renewing ties. Cuba really loves the fact that its top two trading partners are Venezuela and China. These are two countries that go to Cuba, and they say, "You know what? We love you just as you are. You don't need to change a thing for us." Canada, the EU, you have these annoying conversations on human rights and their political prisoners, and it irritates the Cubans; it irritates the Europeans, but there's always a slight element of irritation in Cuba's relationship with Western governments that doesn't exist with governments who are its ideological allies. The infrastructure needs of the country are so enormous that I think that Cuba is going to look

for a range of partners and be very pragmatic about it in the future and sort of turn to developing infrastructure.

And then just on the last point, Guantanamo: it's amazing the number of people who have had experiences there and the stages the debate has had over time. I actually gave a talk to the Rotary Club in Washington, DC, recently and they said that they were interested in doing more with Cuba. I think – the position of me and of my organization – a lot of it centers around the US travel ban, but I think at the end of the day, we need to get the US government out of the business of regulating American citizen travel to Cuba. We don't do it with any other country, and I think that we need to remove that obstacle. If the Rotarians want to find Rotarians in Cuba, if the human rights activists want to work with human rights activists in Cuba, church groups, businessmen, you know... The other question on the investment and trade embargo can be dealt with further down the line, but it seems to me that if you remove the travel ban, that opens up a lot more opportunities for a wide range of interaction.

Question: When you first started talking, you talked about people that you interviewed, but you didn't mention Cuban dissidents, and I wonder when you went to Cuba, did you have difficulty talking to them, can you talk to them? Are they hesitant to talk to you about the issue of the embargo?

Question: [Inaudible question about how official censorship affects information technology and the Internet.]

Question: I'm from the IIE. To go in line with what you were asking: having read your book, I would like to know more about your travels through the rest of Cuba, [inaudible] and I'd like to know [inaudible] people who have been through the Revolution, who may have experienced the changes that resulted, and what kind of feedback you got from them?

Question: I want to ask you to be a little more optimistic and comment on a couple of indicators that I see about what's going on amongst the Obama world that suggest optimism. You and I agree on Congress, that it's an almost impossible situation, and our new senator is a case study: when Gillibrand was running in the House she got \$9,000 from the Miami PAC money, which is...the Miami people don't even believe in family travel, I mean it's all the way over to the right and hopefully that will be as deep as her anti-NRA position, but we'll have to see.

But the optimism: two things have appeared in the last couple of weeks. One is The *Miami Herald* story quoting a high-ranking Republican advisor, which we understand to have been Lugar's principle foreign policy person, to come back to Cuba, in which he declared outright that Obama is going to go substantially beyond the Cuban-American travel issue and suggests educational travel.

Second, is in some ways even more fascinating because of nuance, which is a *US News and World Report* story last week which quotes the famous, anonymous, high-level, State Department person. My guess is Tom Shannon, who's the assistant secretary [Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs] and it sounds like Tom, because it's the first time that an official, American spokesman has acknowledged that a change is happening in Cuba, in terms of the economic

reforms that Raul has started on, and also that there's a serious interest in Cuba in dialogue with the United States, which doesn't sound like much except in comparison with the last 30 years, with Jimmy Carter – I mean, it's a nuanced statement that's very important. I don't know what your sense of it – it's been very closed, and maybe there just isn't any information. They haven't said who's going to replace Shannon; they haven't said who's going to do the NSC. What is your feeling about where that might be heading? I think the last thing I'd like to say in this: in the [inaudible title] book is a yellow sheet which makes reference to almost every significant think tank in the center and liberal portion in Washington: Brookings, the Cuba Study Group, the Council on Foreign Relations have all come out with very strong, fundamental “change the policy” statements. So if there's a firestorm building, it's clearly moving in the direction of Obama not just sitting on his hands, and particularly, he's got to go to the Summit of the Americas with something, so the question is: What does he bring on April 17th to the Summit of the Americas when everybody in the Americas is saying ending the embargo is a priority that the US has to have?

Mr. Erickson: Let me talk maybe a little bit about – there were two questions about Cubans and Cuba and what the people – how they viewed the Revolution and so forth. Maybe a little bit on methodology will be useful. The think tank I work for, [the] Inter-American Dialogue, has two projects that relate to Cuba: one that looks at the Cuban economy and reforms there and another that focuses on US-Cuban relations. As part of that we have a travel license from the US Treasury Department that allows us to travel that I've managed to get renewed on an annual basis ever since I've been there. On the US side, there are very few issues related to Cuba. On the Cuban side, I've been invited to participate in different conferences down there, academic conferences, meetings. I've been there for research and other things but more of an academic nature. I have been to Santiago and, I've been basically to every – I've never done the cross-country trip from Santiago to Havana. I would like to do it sometime. But I have been around [Pinar del Río], Matanzas, I've been to a number different cities within Cuba, and I've been there 15 times. So, there's kind of a bit of accumulated knowledge and accumulated conversations and just a little bit of a feeling of how things are in Cuba that I try to bring in to the book.

During the interview process for the book, which I basically did in 2007, I decided not to do a lot of in-country interviews specific to the book. The reasons for this were one, that the Cuban government tends to treat journalists very different than it treats academics. I'm not a journalist, but if I'm going to go wandering around the countryside, interview everyone, and write a book about it, that could spark a certain response. Secondly, I didn't want to jeopardize people with whom I've had long-standing professional contacts. And third, I personally didn't think I would elicit any unique insight from the Cuban government, because I don't necessarily believe that I would be viewed as *compliant* – although I'm not, certainly, in opposition to them, when they arrest people, “I'm not going to say, well they were mercenaries, and you did the right thing.” And so I did a couple of interviews – I interviewed Dagoberto Valdez, who's basically an activist in Pinar del Rio, who's published a magazine with the Catholic Church called *Vitral*, to get his perspective. There are numerous other conversations I've had with people over time that kind of informed the book, but I didn't, kind of, go down and present my list of, you know, these are the people I'm going to speak with.

A lot of the book, as well is really about the US politics. It's about America's struggle with what to do with Cuba. So I did interview a number of Cubans in exile, including some of the ones that were arrested in 2003 and subsequently released as political prisoners. I interviewed Oliver Stone, who filmed a documentary on Fidel Castro which was put HBO, and then HBO pulled the plug, and it was never shown again in the United States. Oliver Stone told me it was the most censored film he had ever done. He had an easier time making *W.* – about President Bush – than a documentary on Fidel Castro. I talked to Lincoln Diaz-Balart, who is the main voice in Congress for maintaining the sanctions. You know, I can go down the list. The point is a lot of different people that intersected in the political, economic, and cultural sector. So that's a little bit on how I went about writing the book and how Cuban perspectives were involved.

I would have loved to have gone and down and done a whole range of interviews starting with Fidel, Raul, et cetera, et cetera. Of course, would that have been feasible? No. On the Internet, Cuba has one of the worst rates of Internet access in the world. It rivals Burma when you look at statistics. Now, there are some people who are getting more Internet access. You have bloggers who have emerged in Cuba. Some of them have come to quite great prominence like Yoani Sánchez, who no one ever heard of a few years ago. There's a *Wall Street Journal* article about her; her blog gets about one million hits a month. She's allowed to blog.

One of the great [stories], and I recount it in the in the book, is a dispute between Ricardo Alarcón of the National Assembly and a group of computer science students at a local university at a town hall meeting where they complained, "We're really upset, you know, we don't have Internet access." In Cuba, few people have Internet access, but I suppose it's particularly galling to be a computer science student who can't access the Internet. I think that the types of information technology available in Cuba are quite limited. There are more cell phones available. A lot of people had them before, but now it's legal to have them. They've just become cheaper, in fact. The Cuban government has said that it's considering allowing the Internet to have more widespread use, and we could see more of that in the future.

This request to be, well, I'm kind of an optimistic person, but on Cuba, you know, no one ever got it wrong by saying "nothing's going to change." Let me respond to this. If I were to say some optimistic things about US-Cuban policy, what would they be? The first is that, Obama is a post Cold War president; he's the first president who doesn't remember being terrified by the Cuban Missile Crisis as a teenager. He has a very different view of these things, and, politically speaking, he owes nothing to Miami. Now remember, George Bush, when he first won the presidency in 2000, this was right after Elian Gonzalez had been returned to Cuba in the summer of 2000. The Clinton Administration was reviled in Little Havana, in Miami. Janet Reno was less popular than Fidel Castro at that time. Cuban-Americans voted more than 80% for Bush. Bush ended up losing the national popular vote and winning the state of Florida by 537 votes. If Elian Gonzalez had never come to the United States from Cuba, there never would have been a Bush presidency, at all. Now, I don't want to shock everyone, but those are the numbers.

We take Barack Obama, now here's someone who ultimately didn't need the Cuban vote to win Florida. He won a little more than other Democrats, but he still overall lost it; he still won Florida. And even if he had lost Florida, he would have won the presidency. The political clout that the Cuban-American and particularly the hard-line Cuban-American community can have

with the Obama Administration is much, much less than was the case with Bush or even the case with Clinton, who really tried to, from time to time, run to the right – Bill Clinton – on Cuba policy to win more votes in Florida. He even won Florida in 1996 after approving Helms-Burton. That's one reason Obama, if he chooses to act on it, I think really has full political scope to do more or less what he wants on Cuba policy far beyond just the travel measures. Secondly, I think that it would be a very natural move to establish the restoration of people to people travel, cultural travel, educational travel, and just to loosen up the licensing process.

One article I thought of writing, but never got around to, was how Obama could change Cuba policy without even lifting a finger. All we have to do is not be so draconian in the enforcement of all these things that are taking place. Latin America is much more united in its desire to lift the embargo on Cuba than has been true in the past. It's very hard. Every country with a couple of exceptions has normal relations with Cuba. They're pushing hard on this and the Summit of the Americas is coming up. And then I think that, you know, to some degree, if Obama really wants to road test this concept of engaging in dialogue with America's adversaries, why not start with Cuba? Why start with Iran, where [inaudible] this is a bit of a tricky topic. Cuba seems like such an easy way, such a natural starting point, that it seems to me that it would come up on the agenda sooner rather than later.

Question: What case would you make for the Cuban people generally? Regarding the younger people, to let the borders be opened, to let the Americans or whoever come in, and turn Cuba back into what it was pre-Castro. I have been there before; there are a lot of things that have been said about what has been going on... How do people feel – do they want the embargo lifted?

Mr. Erikson: I think that, in general, people would define it in different ways, but the term that's used a lot in Cuba is *abertura*, an opening. The people want to see an opening between the US and Cuba, and whether it's lifting the travel ban, lifting the whole embargo, you kind slice and dice how that exactly looks. The issue for Cubans is that, it is, at the end of the day, their country, and people feel like they want to manage it as they see fit. I think it would be very helpful for people there if it were much more democratic there than is the case now, but I think that we really need to move beyond this notion that the US is going to run in and either recreate Cuba in our image or somehow restore the relationship that existed pre-revolution. We have got 50 years under the bridge. I think that Cuba is a very different country today; the US, in some ways, is a different country today. I think that to open up between the US and Cuba would be positive for both, but we're not talking about Cuba somehow becoming the 51st state.

Question: What about the Cuban-Americans who can't wait to get back there to get their possessions?

Mr. Erikson: There's this big issue about property. Cubans, will they reclaim their property? The Bush Administration toyed around with this and there is different legislation on the books. I think that property is not going to be that big of an issue at the end of the day. US companies have written it off the books. You're going to have no major US corporations seeking to reclaim assets they lost in 1959.

Frankly, a lot of Cuban-Americans have also realized they're not going to reclaim their past property. The documentation on this is pretty atrocious. If you go to the Foreign Claims Settlement Commission, I forget the exact acronym – there was a group from Creighton University that received a big grant to go down and study claims and it couldn't even find some of these addresses. It's very, very difficult.

You're going to have a few squeaky wheels that are going to demand that somehow they are compensated for their property, but this will probably be nickel on dollar and I think that it's not going to be a major thing. To be honest, it's a pet peeve of mine with Cuba policy, because the United States talks a lot about democracy as it relates to Cuba when we want democracy. At the same time there is a property issue that comes up, and I don't think it's right to have property kind of be the wolf in sheep's clothing of democracy. In other words, 'What we really want for you is democracy, but at the same time we're trying to get property compensation back.' I mean, it's been 50 years. Cuba settled all property claims with non-US partners – Latin America, Canada, et cetera. All the Eastern European countries have settled their claims and if there's the political will to do this it's going to be done.