

- Mark your confusion.
- Purposefully annotate the article (1-2 mature, thoughtful responses per page to what the author is saying)
- Write a 1+ page response to the article.

President Obama says he doesn't believe Cuba is supporting terrorism by *The Washington Post*, adapted by Newsela staff 4/17/15

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama has cleared the way for establishing diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba.

In a message to Congress this week, Obama said he plans to remove Cuba from the list of state sponsors of terrorism. The list is made up of countries that provide support for terrorism. The decision also recognizes that Cuba's role in promoting revolution in Latin America has long ago slipped into history.

The announcement follows a pledge made by Obama and Cuban President Raúl Castro to move toward normal relations.

Cuba Once Supported Revolutions

Congress has 45 days to consider Cuba's removal from the list. Lawmakers cannot interfere with Obama's decision without voting on the matter. The Obama administration considers that to be unlikely.

In a news conference, Obama said a majority of Americans approve of his opening the doors to Cuba.

Diplomatic relations with Cuba were broken more than 50 years ago following the communist Cuban revolution that brought Fidel Castro, Raul Castro's brother, to power. Under communism, the government owns all property and people have few freedoms. Cuba was first designated a state sponsor of terrorism in 1982. At the time, Cuba actively supported revolutionary movements, particularly in Latin America.

"Our hemisphere, and the world, look very different today than they did 33 years ago," Secretary of State John Kerry said.

Many of the problems in Latin America remain, including corruption, violence and drugs. However, every country in Latin America — except for Cuba — has a democratically elected government. The violent revolutions that once shook the region have long since died out.

And Then There Were Three

If Cuba is taken off the terror list, only three countries remain. They are Iran, Sudan and Syria.

Josefina Vidal is the the director of U.S. relations at Cuba's Foreign Ministry. She said Obama's decision is a just one, adding that Cuba never deserved to be on the terror list in the first place.

She said that Cuba rejects and condemns terrorism. It also is against "any act whose objective is to encourage, support, finance or give shelter to terrorists."

Obama told Congress that Cuba is not currently supporting international terrorism. It also has promised not to support it in the future.

The State Department recommended taking Cuba off the list. Kerry said that while the United States disagrees with many of Cuba's policies and actions, they are not considered terrorism under American law.

Kerry is looking forward to going to Cuba as soon as possible to open the embassy there, an official said. Countries with normal relations have embassies in each others countries and exchange ambassadors.

The embassies would be in the same buildings that once served as the diplomatic headquarters of both nations.

Other Restrictions Will Remain

U.S. officials said that full normalization of relations with Cuba could take years. Currently, American companies are not allowed to do business with Cuba. Travel is limited. Only Congress can remove the trade and travel bans against Cuba. But the president has the power to establish diplomatic relations.

Before Tuesday's announcement, high-level Cuban and U.S. officials held three rounds of talks on establishing formal relations. Cuba had demanded that the United States take it off the terror list. For its part, the United States said that its officials must be able to freely move around the island. Also, Cuban citizens could not be kept from entering the U.S. Embassy.

A country on the United States' terrorism list cannot buy arms from the United States or receive economic help. There are many other restrictions against Cuba, which will remain in effect under other laws.

"A More Open And Tolerant Cuba"

Democratic Senator Richard J. Durbin of Illinois participated in the effort to reach an agreement with Cuba. He said that while he is not a fan of the Castro government, "I continue to believe that opening up the island to American ideas, vibrancy and trade is the most effective way to see a more open and tolerant Cuba."

Opponents in Congress were led by Cuban-American Senators Robert Menendez, a Democrat from New Jersey, and Marco Rubio, a Republican from Florida. Rubio just announced he is a candidate for president. In the past, several Americans have fled to Cuba to escape criminal charges. The senators argue that Cuba should not be taken off the list because their refusal to send the fugitives back is equal to supporting terrorism.

But the Obama administration has said that is not required to take Cuba off the terror list.

One of the fugitives is Joanne Chesimard, now known as Assata Shakur. She killed a New Jersey State Police officer in 1973 and escaped from prison after being convicted of the murder.

Republican Senator John McCain of Arizona said Cuba should send Shakur back. "It might be a nice gesture, but it's not going to happen."

Possible response options:

- Think of reasons for and against the USA normalizing relations with Cuba. Explain both sides.
- Select any passage and respond to it.