

Back Channel to Cuba: The Hidden History of Negotiations between Washington and Havana

By William M. LeoGrande, Peter Kornbluh

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History is being made in U.S.-Cuban relations right now. This powerful book is essential to making sense of the new and ongoing steps towards normalization between the longtime antagonists. Challenging the conventional wisdom of perpetual hostility between the United States and Cuba--beyond invasions, covert operations, assassination plots using poison pens and exploding seashells, and a grinding economic embargo--*Back Channel to Cuba* chronicles a surprising, untold history of bilateral efforts toward rapprochement and reconciliation. Since 1959, conflict and aggression have dominated the story of the United States and Cuba. Now, William M. LeoGrande and Peter Kornbluh present a remarkably new and relevant account. From John F. Kennedy's offering of an olive branch to Fidel Castro after the missile crisis, to Henry Kissinger's top secret quest for normalization, to Barack Obama's promise of a new approach, LeoGrande and Kornbluh reveal a fifty-year record of dialogue and negotiations, both open and furtive, indicating a path toward a world beyond the legacy of hostility.

LeoGrande and Kornbluh have uncovered hundreds of formerly secret U.S. documents and conducted interviews with dozens of negotiators, intermediaries, and policy makers, including Fidel Castro and Jimmy Carter. The authors describe how, despite the intense political clamor surrounding efforts to improve relations with Havana, serious negotiations have been conducted by every presidential administration since Eisenhower's through secret, back-channel diplomacy. Including ten critical lessons for U.S. negotiators, the book offers a key perspective on the normalization process underway and illuminates a fascinating passage in U.S.-Cuban relations as it happens.

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Back Channel to Cuba: The Hidden History of Negotiations between Washington and Havana By William M. LeoGrande, Peter Kornbluh Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #436441 in Books
- Published on: 2014-10-13
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.25" h x 6.50" w x 1.75" l, .0 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 544 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

An exceedingly well-written and well-documented account. . . . Essential for libraries that support research into the political and diplomatic history of America foreign relations with Cuba in the latter half of the 20th century.--*Library Journal*, starred review

Challenging the prevailing narrative of U.S.-Cuba relations, this book investigates the history of the secret, and often surprising, dialogue between Washington and Havana. The authors, who spent more than a decade examining classified files, provide a comprehensive account of negotiations beginning in 1959. . . . suggesting that the past holds lessons for future negotiators." --*The New Yorker*

LeoGrande and Kornbluh's exhaustive and masterful diplomatic history will stand as the most authoritative account of U.S.-Cuban diplomatic relations during the five decades of Cuban President Fidel Castro's rule.--*Foreign Affairs*

A fascinating and thorough intellectual introduction to the [December 2014 Obama-Castro] accords. . . . The book makes it clear that, during the long period of the Cuban-Soviet alliance, an agreement was practically impossible, though the history of attempts reads like a James Bond novel.--*The New York Review of Books*

Very well written. . . . It will be interesting for specialists, general readership, and undergraduate and graduate students.--*Choice*

A tour de force, *Back Channel to Cuba* never simplifies the complexity of the post-Revolution relationship between the United States and Cuba. The authors' virtuosity and enthusiastic vigor is reminiscent of John Le Carre as a political moralist while adhering to exacting scholarly standards.--*The American Conservative*

Told in clear prose, this richly detailed book underscores how diplomacy makes headlines, but many exchanges happen far from official negotiation tables.--*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

LeoGrande and Kornbluh's groundbreaking work is essential reading for U.S.-Cuban scholars and for anyone who wants to understand the context of Raul Castro and Obama's December 2014

announcements.--*Diplomatic History*

Observers should look to *Back Channel to Cuba* and its mastery of detail and analysis for the precedents that map out the road ahead—and the potholes to avoid.--*American Historical Review*

Review

LeoGrande and Kornbluh have analyzed thoroughly the history of dialogue between two countries locked in a contradictory relationship for five decades, with each side skeptical that the other truly wanted improved relations. With continual change in Washington, and continuity in Cuban leadership, the authors draw important lessons from the efforts of every administration since Eisenhower to negotiate with Cuba.--
President Jimmy Carter

Back Channel to Cuba tells a dynamic, expansive, and anecdote-rich story drawn from compelling primary sources, interviews and declassified documents. Generational change in the ranks of Cuban leadership and transformation on the ground and in the Cuban diaspora in the United States make *Back Channel to Cuba* a particularly timely contribution: history can and should serve as a guide to present and future decisions about the art of the possible by Cuban and American leaders, policy makers, and citizens.--Julia E. Sweig, author of *Cuba: What Everyone Needs to Know*

About the Author

William M. LeoGrande, professor of government at American University, is the author of *Our Own Backyard: The United States in Central America, 1977-1992*, among other books.

Peter Kornbluh, director of the Cuba Documentation Project at the National Security Archive in Washington, D.C., is the author of *The Pinochet File: A Declassified Dossier on Atrocity and Accountability*, among other books.

Users Review

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