

# 2026 Cuban crisis

An oil shortage and economic crisis is taking place in Cuba, caused by an American fuel blockade.<sup>[11][12][13][14]</sup> The island is dependent on imported oil, mostly from Venezuela and Mexico; after the 2026 United States intervention in Venezuela, in which U.S. forces ousted Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro, the resulting blockade of Venezuelan oil destined for Cuba left the island without adequate supply.<sup>[15]</sup> The United States is motivated by a desire for regime change on the island by the end of 2026.<sup>[16]</sup>

The United States began blocking oil tankers heading to Cuba in February 2026, targeting companies such as the Mexican state-owned Pemex and threatening the responsible countries with tariffs should they resist.<sup>[17]</sup> According to *The New York Times* later in February, this is the United States' first effective blockade of Cuba since the Cuban Missile Crisis.<sup>[14]</sup> In January 2026, US president Donald Trump called on Cuba to 'make a deal before it's too late'.<sup>[18]</sup> Trump subsequently said the US could implement a friendly takeover of Cuba.<sup>[19]</sup>

On 13 March 2026, Miguel Díaz-Canel (the First Secretary of the Cuban Communist Party) publicly confirmed for the first time that his government was engaged in diplomatic talks with the United States aimed at addressing the severe US-imposed oil and energy blockade that had left Cuba facing crippling fuel shortages and widespread power outages. The announcement came after years of frosty bilateral relations and was framed as an effort to find "solutions". Up front, Cuba has agreed to release 51 political prisoners.<sup>[5][20]</sup> On April 3, 2026, Cuba released more than 2000 prisoners.<sup>[21]</sup>

## 2026 Cuban crisis

Part of Operation Southern Spear, the aftermath of the U.S. intervention in Venezuela, U.S. embargo on Cuba, and American expansionism under Donald Trump



Location of Cuba in its region

<b>Date</b>	3 January 2026 – present (3 months and 4 days)
<b>Location</b>	<u>Cuba</u>
<b>Status</b>	Ongoing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>U.S. threatens to sanction any country that exports oil to Cuba</li> <li>U.S. calls for the resignation of Miguel Díaz-Canel<sup>[4]</sup></li> <li>Cuba releases more than 2000 prisoners<sup>[5]</sup></li> <li>A Russian oil tanker carrying 100,000 tonnes of crude oil arrives in Cuba on 30 March.<sup>[6]</sup></li> <li>Trump threatens the sovereignty of Cuba by saying that Cuba will be the next country to suffer from a US military invasion</li> </ul>

## Parties involved

 <u>United States</u>	 <u>Cuba</u>
<b>Supported by:</b>	<b>Supported by:</b>
 <u>Cuban opposition</u>	 <u>China</u> <sup>[1][2]</sup>
 <u>Argentina</u>	 <u>Russia</u> <sup>[3]</sup>

## Background

The United States has maintained an embargo on Cuba since 1962. The severity of the embargo has varied over time, with a notable thaw in relations under President Barack Obama.<sup>[22][23]</sup> The impact of the embargo became particularly consequential only after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc, who collectively supplied between 70% and 80% of Cuba's imports.<sup>[24][25]</sup> Cuba's economic crisis began only after the cessation of Soviet trade.<sup>[26]</sup> During the second Trump presidency in January 2025, the US government significantly tightened its economic sanctions against Cuba, orienting it around what it calls a "total pressure" or "maximum pressure" strategy.<sup>[27][28]</sup>

Cuba's economy is dependent on foreign oil with most oil historically imported from Venezuela and Mexico.<sup>[15]</sup> Recent but persistent issues with Cuba's economy and electrical grid triggered the 2024–2026 Cuban protests and 2024–2026 Cuba blackouts.<sup>[29]</sup> In December 2025, as part of the escalation that ended with the United States intervention in Venezuela, the United States seized tankers with Venezuelan oil destined for Cuba and declared a blockade on exports of Venezuelan oil.<sup>[30]</sup>

On 29 January 2026, Executive Order 14380 was signed and entered into force on 30 January, declaring a national emergency in US and authorizing the imposition of additional tariffs on imports into the United States from countries that directly or indirectly supply oil to Cuba.<sup>[31]</sup> The United States confirmed that regime change in Cuba is a goal by the end of the year,<sup>[18]</sup> asking the government of First Secretary of the Communist Party of Cuba Miguel Díaz-Canel to "make a deal before it's too late".<sup>[17]</sup>

## Impacts

According to the United Nations Human Rights Office, the blockade and ensuing fuel shortage have threatened Cuba's food supply and disrupted the country's water systems and hospitals.<sup>[32]</sup> The fuel shortage has prevented the harvesting of crops and undermined efforts toward food sovereignty.<sup>[33]</sup> The lack of fuel has also hampered the UN World Food Programme relief efforts following Hurricane Melissa. In response, the Cuban government has closed schools and universities and limited public transport.<sup>[34]</sup> Garbage has accumulated throughout Havana and other cities due to the lack of fuel for trash trucks.<sup>[12]</sup>

## Blackouts

Cuba experienced its lowest ever temperature of 0 °C (32 °F) on 3 February as measured at a weather station in Matanzas Province.<sup>[35]</sup> On 4 February, the eastern provinces of Guantánamo, Santiago de Cuba, Holguín and Granma suffered a total blackout, while the western part of the island and Havana suffered serious difficulties

Commanders and leaders	
<span><span><span></span></span><span> </span></span> <b>Donald Trump</b>	<span><span><span></span></span><span> </span></span> <b>Miguel Díaz-Canel</b>
<span><span><span></span></span><span> </span></span> Marco Rubio <sup>[7]</sup>	<span><span><span></span></span><span> </span></span> Salvador Valdés Mesa
<span><span><span></span></span><span> </span></span> Pete Hegseth	<span><span><span></span></span><span> </span></span> Manuel Marrero Cruz
<span><span><span></span></span><span> </span></span> José Daniel Ferrer	<span><span><span></span></span><span> </span></span> Esteban Lazo Hernández
<span><span><span></span></span><span> </span></span> Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara	<span><span><span></span></span><span> </span></span> Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla
<span><span><span></span></span><span> </span></span> María Payá Acevedo	<span><span><span></span></span><span> </span></span> Álvaro López Miera
<span><span><span></span></span><span> </span></span> Manuel Cuesta Morúa	<span><span><span></span></span><span> </span></span> Raúl Castro
<span><span><span></span></span><span> </span></span> Duniel Hernández Santos (POW) (per Cuba) <sup>[8]</sup>	<span><span><span></span></span><span> </span></span> Raúl G. Rodríguez Castro
	<span><span><span></span></span><span> </span></span> Oscar Pérez
Casualties and losses	
None	1 wounded <sup>[10]</sup>
5 killed <sup>[9]</sup>	
5 injured and captured <sup>[9]</sup>	

with electricity.<sup>[36]</sup> On 4 March, a shutdown of the Antonio Guiteras Power Plant resulted in power outages for millions of Cubans in the western part of the country.<sup>[37]</sup> On 16 March, Cuba's power grid collapsed leaving the country without power.<sup>[38]</sup>

## Aircraft fuel crisis

On 9 February, Cuba stated that it would not refuel other planes at airports due to a lack of fuel.<sup>[39]</sup> Air Canada suspended flights to the country on the same day, while Rossiya and Nordwind did so two days later, all citing ongoing fuel shortages in the island as a reason.<sup>[40][41]</sup>

## Havana oil refinery fire

A fire broke out at a key fuel processing plant on 13 February in Havana, exacerbating the energy crisis further since the executive order of Trump on 29 January, which imposed an oil blockade. A large plume of smoke was seen rising above Havana Bay from the Nico López refinery on Friday, drawing the attention of the capital's residents before fading as fire crews fought to bring the situation under control. Cuba's Ministry of Energy and Mines said the fire, which erupted in a warehouse at the refinery, was eventually extinguished and that "the cause is under investigation". There were no injuries and the fire did not spread to nearby areas, the ministry said in a post on social media. The ministry said the workday at the Nico Lopez Refinery "continues with complete normalcy". The location of the fire was close to where two oil tankers were moored in Havana's harbour.<sup>[42]</sup>

## Other effects of shortages

On 14 February, it was announced Festival del Habano, an annual cigar festival, was called off due to "the complex economic situation" caused by the "economic, commercial and financial blockade" by the US.<sup>[11]</sup> On 17 February 2026, it was reported that many collection trucks had been left with empty fuel tanks, causing refuse to pile up on the streets of the capital, Havana, and other cities and towns. Only 44 of Havana's 106 rubbish trucks (approximately 41.5% of them) have been able to keep operating due to the fuel shortages, slowing rubbish collection, as waste piles up on Havana's street corners, the Reuters news agency reported on Monday, citing state-run news outlet Cubadebate.<sup>[12]</sup> Canadian mining company Sherritt announced that it would pause operations at its mining facility in Moa.<sup>[43]</sup>

## International actions

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### Halt of Mexican oil

After the ousting of Maduro, the United States began increasing its pressure on Mexico to reduce its oil sales to Cuba with President Donald Trump threatening tariffs against any country supplying Cuba with oil.<sup>[44]</sup> Mexico temporarily halted shipments of oil to Cuba by 27 January and Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum said that the decision to halt oil deliveries was "a sovereign decision".<sup>[45]</sup> In February 2026, Mexico sent two ships of humanitarian aid to Cuba to help alleviate the impacts of the US embargo.<sup>[46]</sup>

## Cancelled visa-free entry to Nicaragua

The government of Nicaragua cancelled visa-free travel for Cuban citizens in February 2026. This border was a frequent route to escape Cuba, used by thousands of migrants since its implementation in November 2021 following the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2021 Cuban protests. It is unclear if the measure was a direct request from United States administration but it is part of a series of concessions made by the administration of Daniel Ortega.<sup>[47]</sup>

## Termination of Cuban medical mission

On 13 February, the Guatemalan health ministry announced it would begin a "phased withdrawal of the Cuban Medical Brigade". The decision was linked to pressure from the US, which has called the Cuban medical mission "forced labor". Income earned by doctors serving in foreign countries is an important source of revenue for the Cuban government.<sup>[48]</sup> In February, Honduras announced that it was ending the Cuban medical mission. The Bahamas, Antigua and Barbuda, and Grenada have also said they would reduce use of Cuban healthcare workers.<sup>[49]</sup>

US diplomat Mike Hammer pressured the government of Calabria to end their reliance on Cuban medical staff.<sup>[50]</sup> President of Calabria Roberto Occhiuto said that Cuban doctors were necessary "to keep hospitals and emergency rooms open" in the region, but that he would consider alternatives to hiring more Cuban doctors. Occhiuto denied the US argument that the program was human trafficking.<sup>[51]</sup>

## US license to sell Venezuelan oil to Cuba

On 25 February, the United States emitted a license allowing companies to resell Venezuelan oil to Cuba's private sector. The US Treasury Department indicated that the exchange must "support the Cuban people, including the private sector".<sup>[52]</sup>

## Ecuador's expulsion of Cuban ambassador

On 4 March 2026, Ecuador expelled Cuban Ambassador Basilio Gutierrez and his staff, declaring them *persona non grata*. No reason was provided for the expulsion.<sup>[53]</sup>

## Russian aid to Cuba

On 30 March, a Russian oil tanker carrying 100,000 tonnes of crude oil arrived in Havana.<sup>[54]</sup> The Russian shipment could be converted into 250,000 barrels of diesel which could cover Cuban energy demands for 12 and a half days. *The Guardian* argued that the docking of the Russian tanker signals greater American flexibility in the ability of Cuba to purchase oil from abroad.<sup>[55]</sup>

## Negotiations

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After initiating the blockade, President Trump called on Cuba to "make a deal before it's too late" without specifying any potential terms.<sup>[18]</sup> On 1 February, Trump said that the US was negotiating with "the highest people in Cuba". However, *Drop Site News* reported that there were no high-level negotiations occurring between the US and Cuba.<sup>[56]</sup> On 26 February, the *Miami Herald* reported that the US had been speaking to

former First Secretary Raúl Castro's grandson, Raúl Guillermo Rodríguez Castro, who is not a senior leader of the Cuban Communist Party.<sup>[57]</sup> The next day, Trump again claimed to be negotiating with the Cuban government saying that the US could "have a friendly takeover of Cuba".<sup>[19]</sup> In a March address on Cuban television, First Secretary Díaz-Canel confirmed that negotiations with the US were taking place.<sup>[20]</sup>

In March 2026, the Cuban government announced that it would release 51 political prisoners in the coming days. The move was described as being taken "in a spirit of goodwill" and followed diplomatic engagement with the Holy See, which has been involved in dialogue with Cuban authorities. The government stated that the prisoners had served a significant portion of their sentences and demonstrated good conduct.<sup>[5]</sup>

## Reactions

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### Cuban Communist Party and government

Initially, First Secretary of the Cuban Communist Party Miguel Díaz-Canel condemned "US imperialism", and called on people to prepare for a "war of the entire nation", while organizing state-sponsored demonstrations against the American oil blockade. On 6 February, he declared that "Cuba is ready for a talk with Washington on every topic without prerequisites", while rejecting negotiations on cases that he viewed as "internal Cuban affairs".<sup>[58]</sup>

### Cuban opposition

On 6 February, *El País* conducted interviews with various Cuban dissidents, including José Daniel Ferrer, Manuel Cuesta Morúa, and María Payá Acevedo. Their reactions were a mix of hope and warning against manipulations, including views that the Cuban government could cease talks when it stabilizes itself.<sup>[59]</sup>

### Other countries

-  Argentina: President Javier Milei supported the United States and condemned the Cuban government for "authoritarianism".<sup>[60]</sup>
-  Brazil: President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva condemned the US fuel blockade and called for humanitarian help for Cubans.<sup>[61]</sup>
-  Chile: Then-current president Gabriel Boric called the blockade "criminal" and "inhumane", saying that "nothing justifies the harm being done to boys, girls, and innocent citizens".<sup>[32]</sup> Then-incoming president José Antonio Kast in turn disagreed with Boric's decision to send humanitarian aid, claiming that it ultimately benefits a "dictatorship".<sup>[62]</sup>
-  China: Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Lin Jian stated "China firmly supports Cuba in safeguarding its national sovereignty and security, and opposes foreign interference" and "will always provide support and help to the Cuban side to the best of our ability."<sup>[63]</sup> Xi Jinping, the General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, approved an aid for Cuba, which includes financial assistance valued at 80 million dollars and a donation of 60,000 tons of rice.<sup>[1]</sup>
-  Mexico: President Claudia Sheinbaum warned about a potential humanitarian crisis.<sup>[64]</sup>
-  Portugal: Portuguese authorities are helping tourists return to Portugal via a stopover in the Dominican Republic due to the fuel scarcity in Cuba. The Portuguese hotel chain Vila Galé closed its operations in Varadero and Havana.<sup>[65]</sup>

- Russia**: President Vladimir Putin condemned US actions and claimed that Russia will continue to send oil to Cuba despite the threats of blockade.<sup>[66]</sup>
- Trinidad and Tobago**: Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar stated that while the humanitarian crisis was a concern, Trinidad and Tobago "will not ... support a dictatorship in Cuba or anywhere else" and that no CARICOM country should entertain dictatorial governments.<sup>[67]</sup>
- United Nations**: Secretary-General António Guterres stated that he is "extremely concerned" about the humanitarian situation in Cuba, "which will worsen, or even collapse", if the country's oil needs are not met.<sup>[68]</sup> UN experts have condemned the executive order issued by the Trump administration, describing the imposition of a fuel blockade on Cuba as "a serious violation of international law and a grave threat to a democratic and equitable international order."<sup>[69]</sup>

Belarus,<sup>[70]</sup> Iran,<sup>[71]</sup> Spain,<sup>[72]</sup> Vietnam,<sup>[73]</sup> and the African Union also expressed their support for Cuba.<sup>[74][75]</sup>

## Other

In February 2026, activists announced plans for the Nuestra América Convoy, which will attempt to break the US blockade and provide humanitarian aid to Cuba during the crisis. The flotilla is organized by Progressive International and contains members of the Global Sumud Flotilla that had attempted to break the Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip.<sup>[76][77]</sup>

## See also

- 2021–2023 Cuban migration crisis
- 2026 Cuban boat incident
- Bay of Pigs Invasion
- Cuba–United States relations
- United States involvement in regime change



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