

# Obama visits Jamaica as part of regional “energy security” initiative

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US President Barack Obama landed in Jamaica Wednesday night, accompanied by US Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz. He was greeted on the tarmac by Jamaican Prime Minister Portia Simpson-Miller.

On Thursday, Obama met to discuss regional energy issues with 14 Caribbean governments in an effort to achieve “cooperative solutions to promote energy security,” according to White House deputy national security adviser Ben Rhodes.

Thursday morning, Jamaican officials announced a new energy pact with the US Department of Energy. The agreement aims to secure Jamaica’s role as a primary importer and distributor of liquid natural gas (LNG) produced by US energy corporations. US firms are seeking to become leading suppliers of LNG throughout the Caribbean.

“It is a good start and it signifies tremendous opportunities and possibilities going forward,” Caribbean Energy Minister Phillip Paulwell said in response to the deal. Paulwell denied that the deal signified a shift away from friendly relations with Venezuela, insisting that Jamaica intends to “work closely with both countries.”

Obama announced that the deal would include a new US-backed investment fund for “clean” energy infrastructure projects in the Caribbean. Obama vowed that the US would pursue a package of “new partnerships” as part of a drive to “mobilize private sector projects in clean energy for the Caribbean and Central America.”

The fund will be managed by US Vice President Joseph Biden’s Caribbean Energy Security Initiative (CESI), launched from the White House in June 2014. CESI aims to “transform the energy systems of Caribbean states,” integrating the region’s gas and petroleum sectors within the framework of a North

American trade zone dominated by US energy corporations and banks.

Signatories to an official CESI Joint Statement issued from the White House in January 2015 included Antigua and Barbuda, Aruba, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Canada, Colombia, Curacao, Dominica, Dominican Republic, France, Germany, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Mexico, New Zealand, Spain, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, and the United Kingdom.

Obama’s Jamaica visit is part of a political offensive in the Caribbean aiming to alleviate the contradictions plaguing American capitalism through the seizure of markets and resources throughout Central and Latin America. Growing Chinese competition for economic influence in the Caribbean, including billions of dollars of Chinese investments in sugar production and infrastructure in Jamaica, including a \$1.5 billion port facility to be built by the Chinese Harbor Engineering Company, is threatening US imperialism in a region it has long considered its “backyard.”

In his public statements yesterday, Obama promised that the new agreements would enable Caribbean countries to purchase energy at much lower prices. “Caribbean countries have one of the highest energy cost in the world,” Obama lamented.

US firms are desperate for new energy markets, with oil prices down 50 percent from mid-2014 amid an historic supply glut in the US oil market. The dumping of cheap energy onto Caribbean markets serves to relieve pressure in the US market, and may also serve to temporarily tamp down growing social unrest on the island, fueled by high prices for Jamaican energy consumers and decades of grinding economic crisis.

The US-controlled International Monetary Fund

(IMF) warned in a recent assessment that economic conditions in Jamaica are threatening the breakdown of “social cohesion” on the island. Jamaica’s economy has shrunk by an average of .3 percent every year during the past two decades, and poverty has skyrocketed since the economic crisis began in 2008, with 25 percent living in poverty according to government statistics from 2014.

The Obama administration announced Thursday that a final decision has already been reached over whether to remove Cuba from the “state sponsors of terror” list. As part of moves to strengthen ties with Havana, Obama is expected to announce that Cuba will be taken off the US black list during the Summit of the Americas in Panama this weekend.



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