

Trump administration tightens sanctions on Havana as it detains and deports Cubans in US

Alexander Fangmann
11 July 2025

On June 30, the Trump administration issued a National Security Presidential Memorandum (NSPM) tightening sanctions on Cuba, which is teetering on the brink of collapse from US imperialism's decades-long embargo. At the same time, Cuban nationals in the United States, most of whom have fled the island due to the American government's policies, are now being increasingly targeted for detention and deportation as part of Trump's crackdown on migrants.

The NSPM reverses several moves made by the outgoing Biden administration during its last week in office, most notably placing the country back on the list of "state sponsors of terrorism." It also reimposes the list of "restricted entities" tied to the Cuban government that are subject to additional sanctions beyond those already stipulated by existing law.

However, Trump's current NSPM goes beyond the measures imposed during his first term in 2017, and suggest that Washington smells blood in the water and is looking to push Cuba further into total collapse in preparation for regime change.

One of the most significant of the new measures would essentially impose sanctions on companies from third-party countries providing "direct or indirect support to companies directly or indirectly owned by the Cuban military." As much of the island's economy, especially the tourism industry, is owned by military-linked conglomerate GAESA, this would potentially open up foreign corporations, such as Spanish hotel chain Meliá, to significant penalties.

Spain is Cuba's second-largest trading partner, after Venezuela. Other countries with significant activity in Cuba include China, Canada, Mexico, Russia, and Brazil.

The Trump administration also plans to crack down even further on travel to Cuba, banning tourist visits by

American nationals and restricting any travel to a limited set of allowed categories, including family visits. However, as Trump's memo says that compliance will be achieved through "regular audits and mandatory record-keeping of all travel-related transactions for at least five years," all travel will be heavily scrutinized and subject to significant financial penalties.

The NSPM also gratuitously reiterates that the "Wet Foot, Dry Foot" policy remains terminated. One of the Obama administration's last acts in office was to end the policy, which allowed almost any Cuban who reached American shores to become a legal permanent resident. As the WSWWS noted at the time:

Cubans will now be subject to the same monstrous policies as other immigrants and refugees, which have seen around three million deported since 2008 and hundreds of thousands per year incarcerated in a vast network of over 200 detention centers.

This has come to pass. ICE agents now routinely arrest Cubans and send them to detention centers and newly constructed concentration camps. Around 42,000 Cubans are currently subject to deportation orders, and over 110,000 Cubans are now vulnerable due to the recent decision by the Supreme Court allowing Trump to end the temporary protected status of around 532,000 Cubans, Haitians, Venezuelans and Nicaraguans who arrived in the US since October 2022.

Cuban reggaeton artist Leamsy La Figura (real name Leamsy Izquierdo), a legal permanent resident, recently brought attention to the conditions at Florida's "Alligator

Alcatraz” concentration camp where he is detained.

La Figura told his partner, Katia Hernández, who relayed his words on Instagram, “I haven’t showered for four days, there’s no water, no toothpaste, they don’t let you out for even a minute. We are in a cage of metal bars with the lights on 24 hours a day, and the mosquitoes seem like elephants.” He noted the extreme cold, saying the facility is “about minus two degrees” and said, “Everyone is in T-shirts, shaking, screaming their heads off. This is hell. There are no Latino officers, just African-American kids or super racist women.”

A 75-year-old Cuban man, Isidro Perez, became the fifth person to die in ICE custody this year after suffering a heart attack in South Florida’s Krome detention center. Perez, who had been in the US since 1966, was detained due to two convictions in the 1980s for cannabis possession.

On June 5, a dozen Cubans detained at Krome launched a protest over their long detentions, lining up in the recreation yard to spell “SOS” with their bodies and “Cuba” using white cloths. According to reports, the men feared being sent out of Florida or to a third country like South Sudan.

Two Cubans, Enrique Arias-Hierro and José Manuel Rodríguez-Quñones were recently deported to South Sudan, according to the Department of Homeland Security, which boasted about the operation due to the two men’s criminal histories. No doubt the Trump administration wishes to establish a precedent with them in advance of a more general move to deport Cubans to third countries, as the Cuban government does not currently accept any deportees who left Cuba before 2017, and only accepts one plane load of deportees per month.

Even more Cubans will find themselves without legal status after the Trump administration’s imposition of a travel ban on Cubans. The travel ban prevents entry of nearly all Cuban nationals except for those with immediate family who are US citizens. But the danger of being detained or deported is unlikely to stop all Cubans from making the attempt. Over the past five years, between 1 million and 2 million Cubans have fled the country, at least 10 percent of the population, with about 850,000 arriving in the US in the three years leading up to September 2024, according to US Customs and Border Protection (CBP).

American sanctions have hit the country hard, with the tighter restrictions imposed by the first Trump administration and continued by Biden, bringing the country to the brink, along with the economic shock

produced by the COVID-19 pandemic and dramatic fall in tourism, which has fallen an additional 30 percent just this year. The resulting lack of foreign currency from collapsing tourism and exports has led to a fall in imports of necessary goods, including food and fuel, the latter of which has led to several island-wide electric grid collapses and rotating blackouts lasting most of the day in some areas.

At the recently concluded plenum of the Cuban Communist Party’s (PCC) central committee, president Miguel Díaz-Canel highlighted the depth of the crisis without offering any real solution, “When we have this electro-energy situation, almost everything stops: there is no water supply, there is no material production, services cannot be offered, because there are almost no hours of electricity. In recent weeks, we have experienced three and four hours of electricity in some provinces, in one day. There are others that have been almost completely shut down all day.”

According to a recent AFP report, the country’s once vaunted pharmaceutical industry is currently unable to import the raw materials necessary to produce critical medications. Other hospital supplies, including gauze, disinfectant, oxygen and sutures, are lacking.

In December, the government announced it would be allowing the circulation of US dollars in some sectors of the economy, including wholesale and retail sales, as well as foreign trade services. This dollarization has led to deepening inequality, with dollar stores well-stocked with food items and other basic goods that are unavailable to the majority of Cubans without access to dollars through work in tourism or family members living abroad.

Anger among workers and other social layers has continued to simmer as a result of blackouts, shortages and widening inequality. University students have recently boycotted classes, and some have even gone on strike over a recent plan by state telecom ETECSA to raise internet data prices.



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