

Washington pressures Mexico to halt supply of oil to Cuba

Don Knowland
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On January 9, a Mexican tanker carrying between 85,000 and 90,000 barrels of oil from Mexico's national oil company Petroleos Mexicanos (Pemex) arrived in Havana. Mexico's President Claudia Sheinbaum said that Mexico would continue supplying Cuba with crude oil in the wake of the US seizure of Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro. Sheinbaum described Mexican shipments in part as humanitarian aid, and added that Mexican oil was especially critical to Cuba following Maduro's capture.

In fact, Pemex has for decades sent oil to Cuba, and in 2024 it ramped up shipments by nearly 20 percent to average around 20,000 barrels per day that year.

By the end of January, these longstanding oil shipments to Cuba became another grounds for Washington's ratcheting up of tensions with Mexico. Trump issued an executive order that directs the US government to impose tariffs on any country supplying Cuba with oil unless Cuba agrees to "align sufficiently with the United States on national security and foreign policy matters."

On January 23, Reuters reported the Sheinbaum administration was reviewing whether to continue shipments to the island amid mounting US pressure, citing three senior government sources who expressed "growing fear that the United States could take unilateral action on [Mexican] territory" if the shipments continued.

On January 26, Bloomberg reported that Pemex had in fact backtracked on plans to send another shipment of crude oil to Cuba.

That same day Trump declared on social media that "THERE WILL BE NO MORE OIL OR MONEY GOING TO CUBA – ZERO!" while *Politico* reported that the administration was weighing a total blockade of oil transport.

Mexican officials reported observing at least three US Navy drones conducting flights over Mexico's Bay of Campeche in January, following the routes taken by tankers when carrying Mexican fuel to Cuba.

On January 28, Sheinbaum insisted that Mexico would continue sending aid shipments of crude oil to Cuba. She described the shipments as humanitarian in nature, and told reporters the oil exports to Cuba and other unspecified countries would be evaluated on "a case-by-case basis."

After a lengthy phone call between Trump and Sheinbaum on January 29, in which Sheinbaum claims Cuba was not discussed, Trump signed an executive order branding Cuba as an "unusual and extraordinary threat." In a further manifestation of the extraterritorial reach of the embargo policy against the Caribbean nation, it threatened that Washington could impose tariffs on goods from countries that sell or supply oil to the island.

In the executive order, titled "Addressing Threats from the Government of Cuba to the United States," the US president mentioned Havana's relations with countries such as Russia and China, and stated that "Cuba brazenly harbors dangerous adversaries of the United States." Cuba was absurdly depicted as a safe haven for Hamas and Hezbollah, just as Venezuela had been.

In response, Sheinbaum warned that this latest measure could "trigger a far-reaching humanitarian crisis" in Cuba, "directly affecting hospitals, food and other basic services of the Cuban people."

She said, "Mexico will look for different alternatives, obviously in the defense of Mexico, as well as to help the Cuban people in a humanitarian way who are going through a difficult time, all in accordance with what has historically been our tradition of solidarity and

international respect.” Mexico would “make it known that a humanitarian crisis for the Cuban people must be prevented.”

Sheinbaum said further that Mexico will maintain its historical position of solidarity with Cuba, and explained that her government will seek to resolve the problem through diplomatic channels. To that end, she instructed Mexico’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs to establish immediate contact with the US government, in order to learn precisely the scope of the decree published by Trump, even though its naked brutality was crystal clear.

US Representative Carlos Gimenez, a Florida Republican and right-wing Cuban immigrant, immediately denounced Sheinbaum’s position in a post on X, deriding it as a “pathetic decision.”

“This major betrayal will not be tolerated in the slightest,” he wrote. He threatened that Sheinbaum “had better keep that very much in mind ahead of the renegotiation of the free trade agreement,” a reference to the US-Canada-Mexico regional trade pact (USMCA) that is up for review this year.

No further oil shipments from Mexico to Cuba have occurred since January 29, nor at this time are any expected.

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres issued a statement Wednesday declaring that he was “extremely concerned about the humanitarian situation in Cuba,” which he said will “worsen if not collapse, if its oil needs go unmet.”

The island’s eastern provinces were hit with another blackout Wednesday, with Santiago de Cuba, the country’s second-largest city, plunged into darkness. The Ministry of Energy blamed the blackout on problems at a local substation disconnecting the region from the national power grid. Power was restored early Thursday.

US Energy Secretary Chris Wright said last week that Washington is already in talks with major trading firms and banks to immediately move between 30 million and 50 million barrels of Venezuelan oil stored on floating platforms and on land.

The Trump administration announced its intention to reincorporate Venezuelan oil into international markets, a move that could reshape the global energy map and economically threaten Mexico, which is currently a principal supplier to the US.

George Baker, an energy sector analyst based in Houston and the editor of the specialized newsletter *Mexico Energy Intelligence*, told the digital publication *Animal Político* that Mexico is especially vulnerable in light of the US machinations. Baker warned that “Mexico is at risk of losing its second-place position (Canada is the top supplier) as a source of crude oil supply to the United States, due to the likely advance of PDVSA, Venezuela’s national oil company that has been restricted for years due to financial and operational problems.”

Rhetorical lamentations, limited humanitarian aid and nationalist “Mexico first” rationalizations serve merely as a cloak to conceal the naked defense by the Sheinbaum administration of the profit interests of the Mexican capitalist class. Expecting major windfalls, the Mexican ruling elite has long agreed to become a key partner in US imperialism’s drive to recolonize Latin America—a policy whose catastrophic consequences in Venezuela and now Cuba are only a warning of what is to come, including within Mexico itself.



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