

Gaza without the bombs: US regime change operation in Cuba deepens inequality, mass hunger

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18 February 2026

The deliberate strangulation of Cuba's economy by the Trump administration has created a humanitarian catastrophe that could lead to mass death comparable to the Gaza genocide without the bombs.

The White House's designation of Cuba as an "extraordinary threat" to US national security on January 29 has launched a US regime-change operation to unilaterally use hunger, disease and social collapse as weapons against an entire population. This is collective punishment on a national scale, banned under international law.

The tightening of the illegal, decades-long US blockade, combined with secondary sanctions and tariff threats against third countries supplying fuel and goods, has pushed living conditions to the edge.

Social infrastructure is disintegrating. The Spanish daily *El País* reports a 70 percent shortage of basic medicines, with doctors estimating that the physician-to-patient ratio has deteriorated from one per 350 inhabitants in the 1980s to roughly one per 1,500 today.

Dengue, chikungunya and other mosquito-borne and respiratory diseases are spreading rapidly, exacerbated by stagnant water, uncollected garbage and blackouts that shut down refrigeration, clinics and water pumps. Satellite imagery shows that power availability was already about 50 percent below normal in January. Now, reports indicate that over 60 percent of the island spends most of the day without electricity.

Universities have been forced to shut down or slash operations as scholarships are cut and campuses go dark. Many primary and secondary schools have also shut completely.

Families spend entire days queuing for cooking gas, fuel or a few scarce staples, instead of working or studying.

Analysts estimated the country had only 15–20 days of fuel reserves. This was three weeks ago. Emergency measures have temporarily extended this: a four-hour workday in many state institutions, drastic limits on interprovincial transport, and sharp reductions in hotel and tourism operations. But these are stopgap measures.

Barring a sudden reversal of US policy or massive external aid, the island's economy faces an effective shutdown.

On Monday, Trump cynically declared that "Cuba is now a failed nation," boasting that the island "has run out of fuel for

airplanes" and adding that Secretary of State Marco Rubio "is talking to Cuba right now." He concluded: "They should absolutely make a deal because it's really a humanitarian threat."

The gangster-like logic is unmistakable: Washington creates the "threat" through strangulation, then demands "negotiations" on its own terms to prevent an even greater catastrophe.

The humanitarian disaster is occurring in a society already battered by years of crisis. An opposition group funded by the US State Department, the Cuban Observatory of Human Rights, estimated last year that 89 percent of Cubans live in "extreme" poverty. The population is believed to have fallen from around 11 million to 8.5 million during the first four years of the COVID-19 pandemic due to record emigration, while GDP remains roughly 15 percent below its 2018 level.

Once, Cuba was the only Latin American country that UNICEF recognized as having effectively eliminated child malnutrition; now, hunger is widespread.

A university lecturer waiting to pick up his daughter from school told *Financial Times* correspondent Michael Stott:

"Yesterday I asked her what she had learnt. Her reply was, 'Dad, I'm hungry.'" The family's last piece of chicken had spoiled due to power cuts; like many neighbors, he was reduced to begging money from foreign visitors to feed his family.

Meanwhile, in a separate report, the FT notes that sections of the emergent Cuban bourgeoisie and upper middle class continue to live in relative comfort. Owners of private restaurants, boutique hotels and import-export ventures keep the lights on with generators and imported solar panels, serve prime Kobe beef and French foie gras, and drive new hybrid or electric vehicles costing up to €45,000.

They are able to exploit loopholes in the US embargo and access foreign currency: US exports of items formally exempt from the embargo—primarily food and select goods—reached \$444 million in the first 11 months of 2025, up 13 percent year-on-year.

By contrast, most working class Cubans depend on state ration shops with collapsing inventories, walk long distances to work, or

spend hours scavenging for any food or fuel they can find, then endure sleepless nights in dark homes.

Privileged layers—some rooted in pre-revolutionary families whose property was never fully expropriated, others drawn from the bureaucracy and the new petty bourgeoisie of small employers—have vastly expanded their operations in the last three decades, especially since the “special period” of the 1990s and the post-Soviet opening to foreign capital. They are also the social base upon which Washington is banking to install a regime openly subordinated to US finance capital.

Secret talks and the search for a puppet

Amid the crisis, the Cuban government has sought limited relief. Mexico, while cutting normal oil shipments, has sent two navy ships with around 800 tonnes of humanitarian aid; Chile and the European Union have promised modest assistance. Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla has toured China, Vietnam and Spain to request aid, securing promises of additional food and medical shipments. But these cannot remotely replace the structural impact of US sanctions on fuel, shipping and finance.

Behind the scenes, the Trump administration is cultivating its own preferred “transition” figure in the heart of the Castro family.

US media report that Secretary of State Marco Rubio has engaged in secret talks with Guillermo “Raulito” Rodríguez Castro, the grandson of 94-year-old Raúl Castro, sidelining official channels. Washington considers the elderly Raúl—not President Miguel Díaz-Canel—the ultimate arbiter of power.

“Our position—the US government’s position—is the regime has to go,” a senior official told *Axios*. “But what exactly that looks like is up to [Trump] and he has yet to decide. Rubio is still in talks with the grandson.”

According to other US official sources, “Raulito could be straight out of Hialeah” in Miami-Dade County; “this could be a conversation between regular guys on the streets of Miami.”

Responding to the *Axios* report, the Cuban government insisted that “there is no high-level dialogue” with the US, and “not even dialogue at an intermediate level,” adding that only the usual low-level exchanges remain.

If true that the Castro grandson, rather than the formal leadership, is being courted, it would signal deepening fractures within the state apparatus. Last week, Díaz-Canel, under mounting pressure, declared in a rare press conference that he was ready for “win-win” talks with Washington.

The emerging picture is of rival factions of the ruling elite vying to offer themselves as US imperialism’s preferred conduit. While this conflict could escalate into violence, for the Cuban ruling elite as a whole, the current disaster is seen not only as a threat but as an opportunity: a chance to impose massive shock-therapy measures—privatizations, mass layoffs, the sell-off of state property—to restore profitability for international capital, offering Cuba as a cheap-labor platform and secure their own wealth and privileges.

This trajectory has roots that reach back to the origins of the Castro government. Four months after taking power in 1959, Fidel Castro insisted: “I have stated in a clear and definite manner that we are not communists. The doors are open to private investments that contribute to the development of industry in Cuba. It is absolutely impossible for us to make progress if we do not reach an understanding with the United States.”

The US embargo forced Havana to seek aid from the USSR and to place large sectors of the economy under state ownership; however, the orientation to a deal with US imperialism and the preservation of a capitalist state and class exploitation over the working class never disappeared.

After the collapse of the USSR, this course was accelerated. In 1998, Foreign Minister Roberto Robaina celebrated “an economic opening with full guarantees for foreign investors,” boasting of deals with Mitsubishi Motors, Castrol, Unilever, Sherritt Gordon, Grupo Sol, Total, Meliá Hotels, Domos, ING Bank, Rolex, DHL, Lloyds, Canon, Bayer and others. The result was the growth of a national bourgeois layer, dependent on foreign capital and sustained by harsh exploitation and police-state repression of Cuban workers.

The present catastrophe is bound up with the long-standing political betrayal of the Cuban and international working class by revisionist tendencies which abandoned the struggle to build an independent Trotskyist leadership and instead hailed guerrillas and petty-bourgeois nationalist movements like Castro’s as substitutes for building the Fourth International in the working class.

The only viable perspective is the revival of the struggle for world socialist revolution under the leadership of the International Committee of the Fourth International, based on a conscious assimilation of these historical experiences. Cuban workers and youth must break with all bourgeois and petty-bourgeois factions, oppose both imperialist strangulation and the internal drive to consolidate a comprador bourgeois layer, and link their struggle with those of workers in the United States, Latin America and worldwide to put an end to the capitalist system.



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