

Cuba repels armed provocation as US tries to starve island into submission

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An armed clash off Cuba's northern coast Wednesday, in which border guards repelled a US-flagged speedboat loaded with weapons, explosives and heavily armed exiles is a serious warning that Washington's campaign to starve the island into submission is entering an even more dangerous and provocative phase.

According to Cuba's Interior Ministry, a patrol craft moved to identify a Florida-registered vessel, FL7726SH, operating roughly one nautical mile off the coast of the province of Villa Clara—far from any plausible “navigation error”—when the boat's occupants opened fire, wounding the Cuban commander. Guards returned fire, killing four men and injuring six others.

Authorities reported seizing assault rifles, pistols, Molotov cocktails and other handmade explosives, ballistic vests, telescopic sights and camouflage uniforms, equipment consistent with an attempted “infiltration with terrorist objectives.”

Most of those identified so far are Cuban nationals residing in the United States, some already on Cuba's national list of individuals wanted for past terrorist activities. One of the dead was an American citizen, according to CBS News, which quoted a White House source. One of the wounded has also been identified as a US citizen, according to news reports. The boat was reported as stolen. A seventh detained suspect has reportedly confessed that he was sent from the US to make advance preparations for the armed group to stage attacks in Cuba.

No amount of spin from Washington can change the basic character of this operation. It is the product of decades-old networks of Cuban exile terrorists and US-based paramilitaries cultivated and funded by the CIA and other agencies since the 1960s. These networks are now being activated under conditions in which the Trump administration has openly moved to strangle Cuba's economy, declare the island a “national emergency” for the United States and threaten any country that sells it oil with punitive tariffs.

Whether or not the White House directly ordered this particular mission, it is inconceivable that the heavily armed gang trained on a farm in South Florida, recruited members through TikTok—as relatives and friends of the attackers boasted to Univision journalist Javier Díaz—launched from Florida and entered Cuban waters without coming to the attention of US intelligence and law enforcement. At the very least, the provocation received a green light from US authorities.

The hypocrisy of US officials is staggering. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who has spent months championing the kidnapping

of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and his wife and the tightening of the fuel blockade against Cuba, now declares that “we are going to have our own information” before drawing conclusions.

Florida's attorney general, James Uthmeier, snarls that “you can't trust the Cuban government” and vows to “hold these communists accountable,” while Senator Rick Scott demands that “the Communist Cuban regime must be held accountable.”

The aggressors are presented as victims, those fending off an armed attack as the real criminals. Is there any doubt what the response of the US national security apparatus would be to a boatload of heavily armed foreign gunmen entering US waters to carry out terrorist attacks?

Rubio had the audacity to state that “it is highly unusual to see shootouts on open sea like that.” This from a government that has openly gloated over bombing boats of fishermen in the Caribbean and Pacific, killing at least 151 civilians in what amount to acts of premeditated murder.

The same ruling class that invoked the sinking of the USS Maine in Havana to justify war to take Spain's colonies in 1898, and that organized the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961 by CIA-armed Cuban exiles, is now laying the groundwork for new provocations in the Caribbean to secure its perennial aim of hegemony.

The timing of the incident underscores its political purpose. It occurred as Rubio traveled to Basseterre, Saint Kitts and Nevis, for a Caribbean Community (Caricom) summit where Washington faced criticism over the kidnapping of Maduro and the fuel blockade against Cuba. Caribbean governments have long-standing trade and political ties with both Venezuela and Cuba.

Saint Kitts and Nevis Prime Minister Terrance Drew, a doctor trained in Cuba, warned bluntly: “A destabilized Cuba will destabilize all of us.” Caribbean leaders also raised grievances over US demands that they accept deportees from third countries expelled from the US, reject Cuban medical missions, cool relations with China and accept that Trump has torn up even limited commitments on climate change as rising seas and storms devastate their islands.

Confronted with this discontent, Rubio adopted a defensive tone on Venezuela. “Irrespective of how some of you may have individually felt about our operations and our policy towards Venezuela,” he said, “Venezuela is better off today than it was eight weeks ago.” He dangled the prospect of Caracas becoming an “extraordinary partner” for regional energy.

At the same time, the US Treasury theatrically announced that it would “support the Cuban people” by allowing limited gas and other oil products, including Venezuelan fuel, to be exported to private Cuban entities and individuals, explicitly excluding the Cuban state.

As Mexico’s *La Jornada* notes, these restrictions “in practice, exclude any Cuban entity with the capacity to coordinate and receive the shipments.” US Cuba expert William LeoGrande told the *Washington Post* that, in any case, private actors will not import enough oil “to really make a significant dent in the humanitarian crisis.”

The real aim is apparent: to further cultivate a layer of capitalists and middle-class business people as Washington’s favored social base for regime change, while the broader population is starved and blackmailed. It is a textbook regime-change operation under the Monroe Doctrine—today openly invoked in practice as the “Trump Doctrine.”

If Washington gets its way it will mean placing in power a comprador elite presiding over even more extreme inequality and cheap-labor enclaves controlled by US corporations and banks. This operation, which would return Cuba to the colonial status that was imposed under the infamous Platt Amendment, forms part of the wider US drive to impose its unfettered domination over all of Latin America and the Caribbean and to prepare for world war against China, Iran, Russia and other rivals.

Since 1959, Cuba has been the target of countless CIA-backed operations: bombings, assassination attempts against Fidel Castro, economic sabotage, the arming and funding of exile terrorist groups and the Bay of Pigs invasion.

The men killed and captured Wednesday fit squarely within this history: long-time residents of the United States, with known records of violent opposition to the Cuban government, training on US soil and organizing openly (in this case on social media) in the name of “liberating” the island through paramilitary action.

This terrorist provocation unfolded as the Cuban people were confronting an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe engineered by Washington. Trump’s January 29 edict has imposed a US blockade, an act of war, to stop all energy supplies to the island.

Fuel shortages have brought blackouts of 20-30 hours to many areas, decimated public transport and food distribution, and wrecked refrigeration and water systems. Medicines are scarce, malnutrition is growing and children go to bed hungry. This is a calculated attempt to starve the remaining 8 million people in Cuba into accepting a US-dictated political settlement.

It must be said clearly: the primary responsibility for this disaster lies with US imperialism. But it does not follow that the Cuban regime represents socialism or an alternative to capitalism. From the outset of the 1959 Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro was a bourgeois nationalist who sought an accommodation with US capitalism. Four months after coming to power, he declared:

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.

Only when Washington rejected even limited reforms did Castro turn to nationalizations and approach the Moscow Stalinist bureaucracy for aid, in exchange for tying Cuba to the Kremlin’s foreign policy and suppressing independent working class politics on the island. After the dissolution of the USSR, the Cuban leadership responded by opening ever more widely to foreign capital.

The severe crisis created by the US embargo is seen by sections of this elite not so much as a threat, but as an opportunity to push through full-scale “shock therapy” and integrate themselves as competitive partners in a US-dominated order.

The *World Socialist Web Site* unconditionally opposes and condemns all acts of US aggression against Cuba, from the murderous embargo to terrorist infiltration and the current campaign of starvation. But we do so from the standpoint of the international working class, not the defense of the Cuban capitalist state.

Any attempt by the Havana regime to exploit this provocation to intensify repression against workers and youth must also be opposed. The defense of Cuba against imperialism, the fight against capitalist exploitation and the mobilization of the working class independently of the Castroite authorities are inseparable tasks.

The way forward lies in uniting the struggles of workers in Cuba with those in the United States, the Caribbean and worldwide. In a recent interview published by the WSWS, a Cuban worker and single mother in Matanzas described life amid hunger and fear and appealed for action from American workers against the embargo.

That perspective must be made a conscious program: dockworkers, transport workers, oil workers and others in the US and internationally can use their position at the levers of production and distribution to break the siege, refusing to enforce the embargo and organizing shipments of fuel, food and medicine.

At the same time, American workers must recognize that the regime that kidnaps presidents, bombs fishermen and starves millions abroad is the same one that wages war on their jobs, wages and democratic rights at home. The fight against war and imperialism is inseparable from the struggle against social inequality, war, fascism and capitalist exploitation in the United States itself.



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