

New sanctions, threats and military exercises set stage for US assault on Cuba

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In what appeared as an offhand remark, Donald Trump openly declared his administration's intentions toward Cuba with chilling clarity last Friday.

Speaking before a wealthy audience at the Forum Club of the Palm Beaches, Trump referred to "Cuba, which we will be taking over almost immediately." The comment drew laughter from the crowd, prompting him to elaborate: "Cuba's got problems. We'll finish one first. I like to finish the job. On the way back from Iran, we'll have maybe the USS Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier come in, stop about 100 yards offshore, and they'll say, 'Thank you very much. We give up!'"

Far from a joke, the remarks encapsulate the real trajectory of US policy. On the same day, Trump signed an executive order designating Cuba an "unusual and extraordinary threat," vastly expanding sanctions against the island. The order targets not only the Cuban state but also foreign companies engaged in security, energy, finance, mining "or any other sector ... as may be determined by the Secretary of the Treasury, in consultation with the Secretary of State."

This escalation follows a January declaration of a national emergency against Cuba, which threatened tariffs against any country supplying the island with fuel.

However, the latest executive order marks a tactical shift from previous licenses allowing for limited channels for US capital to penetrate Cuba through private actors. This apparent shift away from selective engagement, which sought to cultivate layers within the Cuban capitalist class and state apparatus willing to collaborate with Washington in a regime-change operation, marks a sharp escalation of the threat of military action.

The unraveling US debacle in Iran heightens the danger of what Trump believes will be a rapid surrender by Havana and a political victory he can score ahead of the November mid-term elections.

These political and economic measures are unfolding in tandem with a further militarization of the region. One day prior to Trump's remarks, the US Navy announced that its "hybrid fleet is ready" following the completion of the Flex 2026 exercises in Key West, Florida—just 90 miles from Cuba's northern coast.

The exercises emphasized "greater reach, faster decisions and

decisive action" across the Caribbean and Central America. While officially framed as anti-drug operations, the drills incorporated advanced artificial intelligence systems, unmanned platforms and rapid-response integration capabilities.

The scale, location and technological sophistication of these maneuvers belie their stated purpose. Flex 2026 took place directly opposite Cuba, coinciding with intensified intelligence-gathering missions mapping the island's defenses, including flights by MQ-4C Triton drones and RC-135 Rivet Joint reconnaissance aircraft, widely used for preparing precision strikes.

Flex 2026 also tested a "kill chain" scenario against alleged "drug boats" as the Pentagon escalates its extrajudicial killing spree that has murdered at least 186 fishermen in the Caribbean and Pacific falsely accused of drug trafficking, underscoring the lawless character of US military activity in the region.

The "hybrid warfare" doctrine being tested—refined through conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East—is now being directed toward Cuba. This strategy integrates cyber operations, intelligence warfare, economic pressure and conventional military force into a unified campaign aimed at regime change.

These developments expose the fraud of Washington's "hemispheric security" rhetoric. Under conditions of intensifying global rivalries and the erosion of US hegemony, the Caribbean is once again being transformed into a staging ground for imperialist aggression.

However, beyond the geopolitical importance of Cuba, which sits astride the shipping routes used by US East Coast and Gulf Coast traffic headed to the Panama Canal, US imperialism is preparing a historic assault on Cuba in retribution for the 1959 revolution.

In the inaugural speech at the International May Day Rally organized by the International Committee of the Fourth International, WSWs Editorial Board chairman David North explained:

We denounce the blockade of Cuba, the deliberate strangulation of an entire people through fuel cutoffs and sanctions. Even after two-thirds of a century, the

US ruling class has never reconciled itself to the Cuban revolution. Between 1959 and 1960, the Castro regime expropriated some \$1.8 billion in US corporate assets. In the same stroke, the revolution dismantled the mob empire that flourished under the dictatorship of Batista.

The current escalation builds directly on the April 10 White House delegation to Havana—the first such visit since 2016—which effectively delivered a war ultimatum to the Cuban government. During that meeting, US officials demanded sweeping economic and political concessions as a pretext for escalation, including the release of all political prisoners within weeks, the further opening of the economy and compensation for expropriated US assets.

The Trump administration has sought to manufacture a *casus belli*. In mid-April, the White House informed Congress that Cuba had allegedly assisted in recruiting 5,000 fighters for Russia in the war in Ukraine. In reality, the Cuban government even initiated criminal proceedings against individuals accused of human trafficking related to recruitment efforts.

Meanwhile, the island’s economic situation continues to deteriorate under the weight of the US blockade. The arrival in late March of the Russian tanker *Anatoly Kolodkin*—permitted to pass by Trump—provided only fleeting relief, supplying enough fuel for approximately 10 days once refined. A second tanker en route to Cuba was recently observed changing course, remaining weeks away with a smaller cargo.

Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova denounced Washington’s “blackmail and threats” against Havana, reaffirming Moscow’s formal solidarity. However, Russia’s limited fuel shipments are less an expression of principled support than a bargaining chip in broader negotiations with the United States over Ukraine, the Middle East and other geopolitical flashpoints.

Faced with mounting pressure, Havana has responded with a contradictory policy combining concessions and nationalist rhetoric. On one hand, Cuban officials have opened the door to “unrestricted” foreign investment and provided guarantees to US corporations during backroom talks involving sections of the Cuban government.

On the other hand, the government has issued warnings of imminent military danger. On May Day, Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel and his predecessor Raúl Castro led a march of hundreds of thousands to the US embassy, denouncing threats of military intervention and calling on the population to prepare to defend the country.

At the same time, Havana continues to appeal to rival powers for support. In late April, during a gathering in Moscow involving Stalinist and bourgeois nationalist organizations forming a so-called “International Socialist Network,” Fidel Castro Smirnov, the grandson of Fidel Castro, denounced the US embargo, stating it has cost Cuba more than \$144 billion

and is now “asphyxiating” the island. His remarks—“Fidel is here with us. Dreaming, riding on”—were met with a standing ovation.

This participation underscores efforts by the Cuban leadership, alongside figures such as Nicaragua’s Sandinistas and Bolivia’s Evo Morales, to maintain ties with Moscow while navigating escalating US aggression.

Yet these maneuvers reveal the fundamental bankruptcy of the Cuban ruling elite and all bourgeois nationalist leaderships. While one wing appeals to Russia and China, another reportedly engages in discussions with Washington aimed at overseeing a transition toward a pro-US regime, similar to developments in Venezuela, where sections of the Chavista leadership have overseen the transformation of the country into a US semi-colony following the kidnapping of President Nicolas Maduro.

The convergence of sanctions, military preparations and political ultimatums makes clear that the Trump administration is laying the groundwork for a direct confrontation with Cuba. Trump’s open threats, the expansion of economic warfare, and the deployment of advanced military capabilities in the Caribbean all point toward the same objective: the reimposition of a puppet regime akin to Fulgencio Batista’s.

For workers in Cuba, the United States and across the Americas, these developments pose urgent and decisive questions. The defense of Cuba cannot be entrusted to a leadership that seeks accommodation with imperialism nor any section of the US Democratic Party establishment that has long backed regime change in Cuba.

The struggle against war and imperialism requires the independent mobilization of the working class on an international scale, using its economic power to halt the US embargo on Cuba and any military aggression.



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