

US seizes Cuba-bound fuel as Southern Command resumes murdering boat crews in the Caribbean

Andrea Lobo
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US federal agents announced Wednesday that they had seized 90 shipments of biodiesel bound for Cuba at Port Everglades, Florida, and the Port of Houston, Texas. It was the second seizure of fuel headed for the island announced in a week.

The roughly 620,000 gallons, valued at \$2.8 million, were destined for ENETEC, a state-owned wholesaler in Havana that Washington sanctioned in July. Under the fuel blockade imposed in January, only Cuban private companies may receive fuel from the United States.

“An effort of this magnitude to undermine US sanctions does not occur by accident,” said José Figueroa, the Homeland Security Investigations agent in charge in Miami, warning that others “should be on notice.”

Five days earlier, the Coast Guard disclosed that a tactical team had boarded the Comoros-flagged freighter *Grace* with guns drawn on September 5, in international waters between Mexico and Cuba. The ship was escorted to the Mexican port of Progreso, where the Mexican Navy reported finding fuel in its ballast tanks.

“The high seas are not a sanctuary for lawlessness,” declared Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Kevin Lunday. When *La Jornada* asked what legal authority permitted the boarding, it received no answer.

Cuba’s Deputy Foreign Minister Carlos Fernández de Cossío called the seizures “piracy,” writing that it is “illegal, immoral and criminal to subject an entire people to economic asphyxiation as collective punishment for political ends.”

On October 4, US Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) blew up another small boat in the Caribbean, killing four people. It offered no evidence beyond the assertion that “confirmed intelligence revealed the vessel’s active involvement in narcotrafficking.” The attack brings the death toll of the campaign launched in September 2025 to

at least 235 in 70 strikes.

The seizure of biodiesel, the boarding of a freighter at gunpoint and renewed boat strikes all advance US imperialism’s efforts to subjugate the entire hemisphere by means of military force, with Washington having long lost its economic competitive edge to Chinese and European interests.

The claim that the boat campaign is fighting drug trafficking has collapsed in the Ecuadorian courts. Between August 28 and September 16, US forces operating jointly with the Ecuadorian government boarded eight Ecuadorian fishing boats in the eastern Pacific, took off 160 crew members and sank the vessels. More than 140 of the men were handed to Ecuadorian authorities, and 90 are being prosecuted for “illicit association.”

SOUTHCOM called the boats “floating refueling stations” for the Los Choneros gang. Human Rights Watch interviewed 27 people, who described beatings, threats and pressure to confess.

On September 5, a judge in the port city of Manta freed 28 of the men. No fuel or drugs had been handed over by US authorities. The only evidence was 48 fishing credentials and one identity card, delivered by foreign personnel with no chain of custody, and the boats had been sunk without the prosecutor’s authorization, destroying the scene. “Twenty-eight fishermen on a boat is not an association, it is a crew,” the judge said.

On October 7, another Manta judge acquitted 32 crew members of the *Conquista II* and the *María Candelaria*. They were aged 19 to 64 and none had a criminal record. No drugs, weapons or fuel were found, and forensic searches of their phones turned up only family photographs.

The next day, the trial of 46 more crew members was

suspended when the prosecution's witnesses failed to appear.

No boardings have been reported since September 16. The two operations since then, on September 19 and October 4, were both in the Caribbean and left no one alive to testify. UN Special Rapporteur Ben Saul has called the campaign "serial extrajudicial killings" that "plausibly constitute crimes against humanity."

In August, SOUTHCOM replaced Operation Southern Spear with a permanent Joint Task Force-Western Hemisphere (JTF-WHEM), commanded by Marine Maj. Gen. Kevin Jarrard. It works with an 18-nation "Americas Counter Cartel Coalition."

SOUTHCOM commander Gen. Francis Donovan said that "we will locate, close with, and destroy the enemies that threaten our hemisphere."

The fuel blockade against Cuba operates on the same principle. Executive Order 14380, signed January 29, threatens tariffs on any country that supplies oil to Cuba. Mexico, then the island's main oil supplier, halted its shipments two days earlier. In February and May, two Russian tankers carrying fuel to Cuba turned back.

"What we're trying to show them is that there are no escape valves," Secretary of State Marco Rubio told Axios in August. "Every time they create a new mechanism to try and slip away, we simply close it off."

European and Canadian investments were among the first casualties. Executive Order 14404, signed May 1, threatened sanctions on any foreign firm operating in Cuba's energy, mining, financial and defense sectors. Within weeks, Canada's Sherritt, the largest foreign investor on the island, announced it was ending its nickel and cobalt mining operations in Cuba. Spain's Meliá and Iberostar stopped running 27 hotels between them, and Iberia suspended its flights from Madrid to Havana.

By May 20, Texas investor Ray Washburne's Gillon Capital reached a preliminary agreement for 55 percent control of Sherritt, which is attempting to circumvent US sanctions through an American-led arrangement. Other US firms have offered competing bids to Sherritt. What US corporations could not win in economic competition is being secured for them by sanctions and gunboats.

The power grid has collapsed at least six times since January. In June, the UN human rights chief reported that infant mortality had risen to 9.9 per 1,000 births, food production had fallen 60 percent and medicine supplies stood at 30 percent of normal. UN experts warned in August that Cuba risks becoming a "silent Gaza."

Meanwhile, the Pentagon is preparing an occupation.

Last month, CBS News reported an internal Army Reserve message asking whether units could be provided to SOUTHCOM "possibly needed in 90-120 days." They include logistics and engineering battalions, a medical brigade, a forward surgical detachment to treat casualties near the front, and a military police brigade, whose missions include detentions.

Pentagon planners have also drawn up options for an air assault on Cuba by several thousand troops of the 101st Airborne Division.

On October 5, the Pentagon released images of the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit rehearsing night helicopter raids similar to the one that seized Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro on January 3. The unit deploys this fall with the *Kearsarge* Amphibious Ready Group.

Trump's advisers have told the *New York Times* that the Cuban government "could be gone by the time of the midterm election" on November 3.

None of the governments that claim to oppose Washington's unprovoked war of aggression has defended the Cuban population. The Sheinbaum government in Mexico cut off oil shipments in January, and its navy has now inspected a ship seized by the US on the high seas. Moscow's tankers turned around. China has offered limited humanitarian aid. The Cuban government itself has courted US companies and Miami investors in search of a deal.

Workers in the United States and internationally must oppose unconditionally and actively the blockade and any military attack on Cuba, uniting against imperialist war on the basis of an international socialist program.



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