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Cuba in Crisis: Energy Collapse and Geopolitical Contestation

By

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The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the organization.

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Cuba is currently facing one of its most severe economic crises since the post-Soviet period. A collapse in energy supply is intensifying pressures from the United States and furthering the geopolitical contest involving Russia and China.

Immediate Trigger

The most immediate manifestation of the crises is the near total breakdown of Cuba's electrical system, culminating in nationwide blackouts that have left much of the island, including Havana, in the dark. The nation had been struggling with frequent blackouts in the previous weeks and faced a 'complete disconnection'² on the 16th of March. These outages are tied to acute fuel shortages, as Cuba is heavily reliant on oil imports from Venezuela, Mexico, and Russia to support its energy needs, producing only 40% of its required fuel domestically.³ The aging infrastructure, compounded with the fuel scarcity, has pushed its electrical grid to repeated collapses.

U.S involvement

At the very core of this crisis lies the de facto oil blockade targeting shipments from Venezuela and pressuring other third-party countries, such as Mexico, not to fuel Cuba either. Cuba generates most of its electricity through oil and for generations Venezuela has been a frontline oil provider, until the US intervention. Following this, the Trump administration ordered Venezuela to halt its oil supply, which has effectively left Cuba without sufficient oil imports for months.

The purpose of initiating this severe blockade is to potentially force yet another regime changes or political concessions at the least; this is clearly evidenced by President Trump's confidence in gaining a political win in Cuba. 'I do believe I will have the honour of taking Cuba,' he said, signalling that aims of regime change are well within the realm of possibility. Cuba has posed a strategic threat to the U.S. since the Cuban Missile Crisis. Its communist history and role within Soviet Russia's sphere of influence create a familiarity between the two, proving to be an extreme strategic insecurity. 'Cuba hosts one of Russia's largest overseas signals intelligence facilities' known as Lourdes, according to President Trump's executive order in January, which framed its existence as a threat to national security.⁴ While the historic facility is aged, its proximity is a concern for the U.S., as it places Russia within earshot of several key U.S. military facilities, including the Central Command in Florida, which oversees the Middle East.

Russian and Chinese Engagement

The U.S.'s consistent blockades, which have amplified since its new influence over Venezuela, have triggered consistent failures in the Cuban electrical grid. This could potentially become a humanitarian crisis as hospitals will soon struggle to power backup generators and civilians

2 <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2026/03/19/world/americas/cuba-blackout-electricity.html?smid=nytcare-ios-share>

3 <https://www.bnamericas.com/en/interviews/cuba-faces-mounting-energy-crisis-as-fuel-imports-run-dry>

4 <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/03/24/us/politics/cuba-russia-china.html?smid=nytcare-ios-share>

worry about access to food and clean water.⁵ This crisis has pushed Cuban allies, Russia and China, to act before U.S. pressures force unfavourable outcomes, as President Miguel Díaz-Canel has already acknowledged talks with the Trump administration in desperation.⁶ In defiance of the U.S. embargo, two shipments of Russian oil and gas were sent ahead to test the threshold of the U.S. blockade, which have been struggling to reach Cuba amid intensified patrols.⁷ Meanwhile, China has been providing financial aid and food assistance, positioning itself as a stabilizing partner.⁸

Likely Outcomes

Regime change in Cuba has been an objective for most U.S. presidents; the Trump administration has been laying the groundwork for potential intervention by preparing a casus belli that signals that the U.S. is pushing to secure its national security interests within the region. Framing Cuba and its Russian and Chinese bases, including Lourdes, as national security threats in his January Executive Order is evidence of this claim. In these heightened circumstances, and considering the intervention in Venezuela, there may indeed be potential for intervention in Cuba, especially if one was to believe the kind of rhetoric the POTUS has been using: ‘taking Cuba. Whether I free it, take it – I think I could do whatever I want with it’.⁹ While securing national security interests may play a role in their calculus, the general transactional nature of the Trump administration point to an economic hidden agenda. After the nationwide electricity blackout, Cuban Deputy PM Oscar Perez-Oliva Fraga noted that ‘Cuba is open to having a fluid commercial relationship with U.S. companies’.¹⁰ Considering the severity of the potential humanitarian crisis that may result from the severe U.S. embargo, Cuba may have no choice but to turn to them by opening its economy and making other political concessions.

5 <https://www.nytimes.com/video/world/americas/100000010789711/cuba-power-outages-food-water.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share>

6 <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/03/13/world/americas/cuba-us-talks-trump-oil.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share>

7 <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/tanker-carrying-fuel-originally-bound-cuba-diverts-trinidad-shipping-data-shows-2026-03-20/>

8 https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-willing-help-cuba-amid-jet-fuel-shortage-foreign-ministry-says-2026-02-10/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

9 <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/03/17/world/americas/trump-cuba-intervention.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share>

10 <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/03/16/world/americas/cuba-us-foreign-investment-businesses.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share>



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