



THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE
OF RESOLVING THE
CUBA
QUESTION AS PART OF AN
“AMERICA FIRST”
POLICY

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With the new policies of the Trump Administration, we are at a strategic inflection point with respect to both Cuba and the Caribbean more broadly, with opportunities and risks that go beyond what happens in Venezuela, or with narcotrafficking.

The Caribbean is the U.S. southeast maritime border. It is a key route for drugs and irregular migration to the United States but also host to numerous [commercial shipping lanes](#) connecting both North and South America to the Pacific. From a national security perspective, some of the most sensitive U.S. military installations are located in or near the Caribbean. In time of a war in the Indopacific, U.S. warships, many military supply ships, and those carrying key heavy equipment to the warfight, would [naturally pass through the region](#), not far from Cuba.

As we saw during the Cuban Missile Crisis, Cuba's geographic location, both proximate to the United States, and central to the Caribbean, makes it and the activities of its Communist regime, of significant strategic importance to the U.S.

As the Trump Administration [dedicates expanded attention](#), [military](#) and other resources to the region, it is important to remind ourselves why dealing decisively with Cuba is central to the success of the Administration's "Americas First" agenda.

First, Cuba continues to host extra-hemispheric U.S. adversaries, including conducting significant military engagement with them.

Just last year, it hosted the Russian missile frigate [Admiral Gorshkov](#), and the [nuclear submarine Kazan](#) in the Port of Havana.

The U.S. government has recognized that the PRC operates military signals intelligence facilities in Cuba, including at Bejucal. The Center for Strategic and International Studies has identified [four likely Chinese ELINT sites](#) on the island, that could be used to observe the activities of U.S. installations such as JIATF-South, the movements and electronic signatures of U.S. warships, aircraft, and submarines, and possibly even host hostile forces targeting them.

Miguel Diaz Canel was just in [China in September 2025](#) for its annual military parade and for consultations with PRC leadership.

Cuba has also publicly collaborated with Iran, with former Iranian President Ashtiani [visiting the Island in December 2023](#).

Cuba has also been key to the survival of Venezuela's authoritarian Bolivarian regime since the beginning of the Hugo Chavez Presidency, serving as a key intellectual author of its hijacking of Venezuelan democracy, and [supplying intelligence personnel](#) and other resources to help Chavismo maintain control over its population. That support has thus indirectly enabled Venezuela current criminal activities killing U.S. citizens, both [through drugs](#) and violent criminal gangs such as [Tren de Aragua](#) preying on desperate Venezuelan migrants.

Cuba has also participated in the intellectual authorship of anti-U.S. radical left movements from the regimes of [Rafael Correa](#) in Ecuador and [Evo Morales](#) in Bolivia, to attempts to sabotage democracies in Ecuador and [Chile](#) in 2019, Colombia in 2020, just to name a few.

Cuban espionage has also long targeted both the United States and the destabilization of democratic partners in the region. These include the

Cuban Five, Ana Montes, and most recently, [Manuel Rocha](#) who long had access to the highest level US government officials and secrets, and shaped US policy in the Americas.

As the Trump Administration focuses on migration and drugs, it is important to recall that [over a million persons](#) have left Cuba since 2020 due to its repression and economic collapse. In addition, it was not by coincidence that Chinese fentanyl trafficker [Zhi Dong Zhang](#), known as “[Brother Wang](#)”, sought refuge in Cuba, after escaping jail in Mexico.



KEY EVENTS:

RUSSIA, CHINA, IRÁN IN CUBA:

(2020 - 2025)

MASSIVE CUBAN EXODUS

2020-2024



- More than one million Cubans flee due to **state repression** and economic collapse.
- Creates major regional impacts on migration flows, public security, and humanitarian pressure.

DECEMBER 2023



OFFICIAL IRANIAN VISIT TO CUBA

- Former **Iranian president Ashtiani** travels to Havana.
- Signals deepening strategic cooperation between Tehran and Havana.

EXPANSION OF CHINESE INTELLIGENCE OPERATIONS

2023-2024



- U.S. government confirms **Chinese SIGINT** (signals intelligence) facilities operating from Cuban territory.
- CSIS identifies four potential listening stations, including upgraded infrastructure in Bejucal.

2024



ARRIVAL OF RUSSIAN WARSHIPS IN CUBA

- **Russian naval assets** dock in Havana, including: Admiral Gorshkov guided-missile frigate, Kazan nuclear-powered submarine
- Marks an escalation of military exercises and cooperation between Russia and Cuba.

THE "BROTHER WANG" FENTANYL KINGPIN CASE

2024



- **Chinese trafficker Zhi Dong Zhang** ("Brother Wang") escapes a Mexican prison and seeks refuge in Cuba.
- Indicates protection networks and transnational criminal linkages involving actors on the island.

2024-2025



CUBAN INTELLIGENCE ACTIVITIES IN VENEZUELA

- Cuba remains the architect of **Maduro's intelligence apparatus**.
- Assists in identifying and neutralizing military desertion attempts.
- Facilitates operations tied to the Cartel of the Suns and other criminal structures.

CUMULATIVE EVIDENCE OF CUBAN INTERVENTION ACROSS THE REGION

2019-2025



- Documented involvement in political operations, **destabilization efforts**, and ideological coordination in: Ecuador (Correa network), Bolivia (Morales government), Chile (2019 social unrest), Colombia (2020 instability attempts).
- Includes iconic espionage cases: "The Cuban Five," Ana Montes, Manuel Rocha (2023).

I do not advocate US military intervention in Cuba. I do, however, advocate that President Trump Administration seize the opportunity of the expanded US presence in the Caribbean, to double down on the posture he adopted in his first term, of aggressive containment, to reduce Cuban opportunities to undermine US interests in the hemisphere.

As the US ramps up pressure in Venezuela, it should privately demand that Cuba stand down its intelligence presence there that has helped identify and deter Venezuelan military and other elites defecting from Maduro, if Cuba wishes to be exempted from the list of U.S. targets supporting the *Cartel de los Soles* criminal franchise running Venezuela.

The U.S. should demand Cuba PRC, Russian, Iranian and other military operations from Cuban soil, and Cuban cooperation with subversive movements in the region.

While I believe a democratic, U.S. friendly Cuba is ultimately necessary for U.S. security and prosperity in the region, I believe that aggressive containment is the most prudent path in the near term. That containment, however, should also be accompanied by US support for the Cuban people's access to information, engagement, and political rights, to expose the fissures in the regime that will pave the way for the end of Communist Party rule and Cuba's re-integration into the family of democratic nations.

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