

Naval blockade broken: Russian oil tanker reaches Cuba



Featured image: The Russian oil tanker Anatoly Kolodkin has arrived in Cuba (Source: [W. Bulach/Commons/CC-BY-SA 4.0](#))

The Russian oil tanker Anatoly Kolodkin docked in the port of Matanzas on the morning of March 31, after it had already become clear the previous day that the ship would reach Cuban waters. It is carrying approximately 100,000 tons of crude oil—more than 700,000 barrels—as the Russian Ministry of Transport [confirmed](#), according to the Interfax news agency. Cuban media also [confirmed](#) the tanker’s arrival.

This is the first oil shipment to reach Cuba since the beginning of the year. The ship had departed from the Russian port of Primorsk on March 8 and 9, respectively, and was escorted by a Russian Navy vessel as it passed through the English Channel.

Three months without fuel

The delivery comes at a critical time. Since January, Cuba has received only minimal fuel imports. The background is a de facto oil blockade by the U.S. government ([Cubaheute reported](#)).

Just hours before the tanker’s arrival, U.S. President Donald Trump made a surprising about-face. Aboard Air Force One, he told reporters on Sunday: “If a country wants to send oil to Cuba now, I have no problem with that, whether it’s Russia or not.” He went on to explain: “Whether an oil tanker arrives or not, it doesn’t matter,” the news agency *EFE* [quoted](#) the president as saying. Previously, Trump had threatened tariffs against any country supplying fuel to Cuba and even hinted at a possible military intervention to “take over” the island.

The U-turn was [triggered](#) shortly before by a revelation in the *New York Times* that Washington would allow the Russian tanker to enter Cuba. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov confirmed on Monday that the authorization had been discussed “in advance” in contacts with White House representatives.

It remains unclear whether Trump’s remarks represent a permanent easing of the energy blockade or merely a one-time concession. Just over a week ago, the U.S. Treasury Department had placed Cuba on a list of countries prohibited from receiving Russian oil. While sanctions on Russian oil shipped before March 12 were eased for one month—Cuba, Iran, and North Korea were explicitly exempted from this.

Trump, however, had repeatedly stated that he wanted to “address” the Cuba issue as soon as the war with Iran was over. It is therefore quite possible that the U.S. does not want to see a complete humanitarian collapse off its coast for the time being, until the military is fully operational. When that will be, however, remains to be seen given the ongoing escalation in the Middle East. Havana is likely counting on holding out until the midterms in November, after which Trump’s ability to act could be limited by a different balance of power.

Short-term relief, not a solution

The tanker Anatoly Kolodkin belongs to the Russian shipping company Sovkomflot, which, like the ship itself, is subject to U.S. sanctions. Russia’s Energy Minister Sergei Tsivilev described the delivery as a “humanitarian shipment” due to the island’s difficult situation caused by U.S. sanctions.

Kremlin spokesman Peskov reiterated on Monday that Russia would continue to support Cuba: “The desperate situation in which the Cubans find themselves cannot, of course, leave us indifferent. We will continue to work on this matter,” he said, according to a report by the news agency *EFE*.

According to [estimates](#) by energy experts such as Jorge Piñón, the shipment is expected to cover Cuba’s needs for several weeks. The country requires approximately 100,000 barrels of oil per day, of which about 40,000 come from domestic production. The remaining shortfall of around 60,000 barrels must be covered by imports.

Under normal circumstances, the shipment would last just under two weeks. However, due to the [rationing measures](#) in effect since February 6, it could stabilize the current situation for another month.

Meanwhile, numerous countries have provided Cuba with humanitarian aid. Whether the arrival of the Anatoly Kolodkin marks the beginning of a lasting easing of tensions or remains merely a short-term respite will depend largely on how U.S. policy toward the island develops in the coming weeks—and whether other countries, such as Mexico, join the Russian initiative and plan to resume oil shipments. ([Cubaheute](#))