

U.S. imposes sanctions on state-owned oil company Cupet



The latest U.S. sanctions target Cuba's largest energy company (Source: [Mosbatho/ Commons/CC-BY-SA 4.0](#))

On Thursday, the U.S. government [added](#) Cuba's state-owned oil company Unión Cuba-Petróleo (Cupet) to the U.S. Treasury Department's sanctions list. With this move, the Trump administration is directly targeting the country's most important energy company, which is responsible for the production, storage, and refining of petroleum products on the island.

Energy as a Weapon

Washington justified the move by stating that Cupet owns properties used for fuel storage that were originally "illegally expropriated from U.S. owners." According to [media reports](#), these properties are linked to negotiations between an importer and the Florida-based company Vanguard Energy regarding crude oil shipments to Cuba. On Wednesday, the U.S. State Department explicitly denied having granted Vanguard Energy a license that would circumvent Trump's embargo on foreign oil shipments to Cuba, which has been in effect since January.

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio explained in his own justification for the move that energy in Cuba "has long been used as a weapon by the communist regime—both for oppression and to enrich the kleptocracy." Without citing evidence, [he accused the Cuban leadership](#) of stealing and hoarding fuel.

What is actually proven, however, is that the U.S. is using energy as a weapon against the Cuban people. Just a few weeks ago, [Rubio claimed](#) there was no oil blockade against Cuba, even though Washington has imposed a de facto naval blockade on energy shipments since January and [is threatening](#) potential suppliers with punitive tariffs. As a result, only a few isolated shipments from Russia have arrived since January, while several ships that Cuba had contracted on the spot market were diverted by the U.S. Coast Guard.

The sanctions against CUPET are likely to have immediate effects on the daily lives of the Cuban people. The fuel shortage [is affecting education](#) and healthcare, public transportation, power generation, food production, and the supply of essential goods. Every new sanction further exacerbates the strained supply situation on the island.

UN voices sharp criticism

In this context, the United Nations [has warned](#) repeatedly of a humanitarian crisis that is hitting the most vulnerable segments of society particularly hard. “The fuel restrictions imposed since early 2026 and recent tightening of extraterritorial sanctions, taken together, are directly harming Cubans, especially the most vulnerable,” said Volker Türk, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. “Children are dying because doctors lack access to essential medical supplies and medicines. This is unacceptable.”

“Such severe sanctions packages that target entire sectors of an economy and produce broad, indiscriminate and harsh effects on populations are incompatible with basic principles of international human rights law,” said Türk.

Meanwhile, the ongoing talks between Washington and Havana appear to have reached an impasse. Most recently, U.S. Secretary of War Pete Hegseth visited the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo in the east of the island—which Cuba classifies as an occupation [in violation of international law](#)—on Wednesday and [declared there](#), with regard to a possible kidnapping or assassination of President Miguel Díaz-Canel, that “all options are on the table.” At the same time, speaking from Guantánamo, he warned Cuba not to acquire defensive weapons capable of reaching U.S. territory. ([Cubaheute](#))