

## US energy blockade: Cuba activates Fidel's contingency plan



*Díaz-Canel with the emergency plan, which is to be presented and activated in the coming days (source: [Presidencia/YouTube](#))*

What next for Cuba? After US President Donald Trump imposed a complete oil embargo on the socialist island by [rerouting ships](#) and threatening punitive tariffs on all potential suppliers, warnings of a humanitarian crisis are circulating. UN Secretary-General António Guterres [said on Thursday](#) that he was “extremely concerned” about the impending supply disaster if deliveries continue to be paused. [Analysts](#) gave the economy between [two weeks](#) and [two months](#) before coming to a complete standstill.

At the same time, life in Cuba has continued as usual in what is now the fifth year of crisis. The electricity deficit has remained high in recent weeks, at around half of demand. The queues at gas stations have grown longer, but there is no sign of a standstill; Havana's main thoroughfares are bustling with the usual hustle and bustle and traffic. The uncertainty surrounding the tense situation since the kidnapping of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and the end of Venezuelan oil supplies has not yet been clearly reflected on the streets or in the government's actions – until now.

On Thursday, Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel commented on the state of the nation in a two-hour press conference. Just a few hours earlier, on Wednesday evening, the power grid in the east of the island [collapsed](#) (not due to a power shortage, but as a result of a fault in a substation). Now the wheels in the island's political machinery are beginning to turn faster, much like before a hurricane. The country is switching to crisis mode.

**Opción Cero: A plan from the 1990s is being put into action**

“No fuel has arrived in this country since December,” Díaz-Canel [explained](#) to representatives of Cuban and foreign media whom he received in the press room of the Palace of the Revolution in Havana. He said it was “reprehensible that a major power should pursue such an aggressive and criminal policy toward a small country.” The energy blockade, which is intended to prevent “even a single drop of fuel” from reaching Cuba, will have serious and grave consequences for the country, its people, and its economy, Díaz-Canel made clear.

For over 60 years, the US has been trying to bring down the Cuban revolution. Now, they're trying to do this by deliberately “choking” the economy and maybe even going military.

So, the government has come up with a contingency plan based on an idea from the late revolutionary leader Fidel Castro during the so-called Special Period in the 1990s. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Cuba's main supplier at the time, Castro had drafted the “Opción Cero” (Option Zero) plan, which envisaged a scenario without oil supplies.



In addition to rationing measures, the plan included steps such as the massive expansion of local food production, the use of draft animals, the establishment of neighborhood charcoal kitchens, and non-motorized methods of transportation. “These measures are planned, but they have been updated because the

situation is different today,” Díaz-Canel said. Specific details of the planned measures would be announced “in the coming days” by the relevant ministers.

The implementation of this plan would require “great effort and, yes, sacrifices.” “I am not an idealist. I know that we will face difficult times—we have done so before—but we will overcome them together, with creative resistance, with the effort and talent of the majority of Cubans,” said Díaz-Canel.

## “Cuba is not alone”

The government is currently working on all fronts to keep the planned cuts to the population as low as possible and to ensure that fuel is delivered again. However, surrender is not an option. Not only the revolution, but also Cuba's independence is at stake, according to Díaz-Canel.

He pointed out that, in addition to expressions of solidarity, “there are other things that we cannot openly declare today because the enemy is pursuing all avenues that could open up for Cuba, but I can assure you with all responsibility that Cuba is not alone.” At a time like this, there are “many people, governments, countries, institutions, and companies that are willing to work with Cuba and have already shown us ways, mechanisms, and intentions for how we can proceed,” said Díaz-Canel.

As the news agency *Reuters* [reports](#), Russia has announced that it intends to continue supplying Cuba with oil. Alongside [Mexico](#) and Venezuela, Russia was one of the three most important suppliers, albeit with significantly lower volumes.

## Solar and oil: expansion of the energy infrastructure

The expansion of renewable energies also offers a glimmer of hope. Following the [massive expansion of solar energy](#) since last spring, Cuba now has around 1000 megawatts of installed PV capacity. This is already sufficient to cover around 38 percent of its electricity needs during the day. An agreement has now been reached with China to accelerate the program. Over the next eight weeks, the completion of several large parks is expected to add 160 megawatts.

“In addition, we are currently installing 5,000 photovoltaic modules at key locations to provide services to the population,” Díaz-Canel explained. This will make 161 maternity wards, 121 households with children who are dependent on medical equipment, 156 nursing homes, 305 senior centers, 56 polyclinics, 336 bank branches, and 349 administrative offices largely energy self-sufficient. Another 5,000 photovoltaic systems will benefit households in remote regions as well as doctors and teachers, who will be able to purchase them through long-term loans. In addition, new battery storage systems with a capacity of 200 megawatts will be installed to utilize surplus energy at night and stabilize the grid.

Further solar power is to be brought into the country through private initiatives: “We have created incentives so that anyone who wants to purchase a photovoltaic system for their home can do so in the best and fastest way possible in terms of customs, price, and payment methods,” said Díaz-Canel. Private grid feed-ins and local supply structures are to be promoted. All of the measures mentioned will be implemented immediately and “amid these difficult circumstances,” the president emphasized.



Another component of the strategy is to make better use of domestic crude oil. Cuba can currently cover about one-third of its oil needs with its own production. However, Cuban oil is heavy and has a high sulfur content. Cuba does not have the technical capabilities to process it into fuel, which is why it can only be used for combustion in the country's eight large thermal power plants. However, Cuban scientists are now working on new processes. “At the end of last year, we conducted a small test on refining domestic crude oil, which opens up new perspectives,” said Díaz-Canel.

Production is set to increase further this year. At the same time, work is continuing at full speed on the [reconstruction](#) of the [burnt-down storage tanks](#) at the Matanzas supertanker base in 2022 in order to restore lost storage capacity. According to the latest reports, the basic construction of the new tanks is already complete, with only the technical equipment still to be installed.

## Havana ready for dialogue – and defense, if necessary

Díaz-Canel reiterated earlier statements by the Cuban Foreign Ministry that Havana was fundamentally willing to hold talks with Washington, but “without pressure, without preconditions, on an equal footing and while preserving our sovereignty, independence and self-determination,” the head of state clarified. Cuba's top diplomat in the United States, Carlos Fernández de Cossío, announced this week that initial messages had been exchanged. However, formal bilateral dialogue has not yet taken place.

“We Cubans do not hate the North American people; we recognize the values of their history and culture,” Díaz-Canel emphasized. Previous encounters in science, sports, culture, and health have shown how much both peoples could achieve together—and how much the “criminal blockade policy” is depriving them of.

At the same time, Havana is stepping up its defense preparations. In response to the events of January 3 in Venezuela and increasing US threats, a plan based on the principle of “Guerra de Todo el Pueblo” (people's war) has been activated, Díaz-Canel explained. This defense doctrine, which is enshrined in the constitution, is purely defensive and is never directed against other states. “We are not a threat to the US,” the president clarified. Recently, all Saturdays have been declared national defense days, on which the entire territorial defense system, from the local council to the National Defense Council, trains.

The president responded sharply to the US classification of Cuba as a state sponsor of terrorism: It was not Havana, but Washington that had systematically financed terrorism against the island – from over 600 assassination attempts on Fidel Castro to the [bombing of a Cuban civilian aircraft over Barbados](#) in 1976, which killed 73 people. Trump's decision to put Cuba back on the terror list, after Biden had removed it shortly before the end of his term in office, proves the arbitrariness of this measure.

“Cuba is not a terrorist country and does not pose a threat to the US,” Díaz-Canel emphasized. There are no foreign military bases or troops on Cuban soil – with one exception: “The one in Guantánamo – an illegal US base on Cuban territory against the will of the Cuban people.” ([Cubaheute](#))