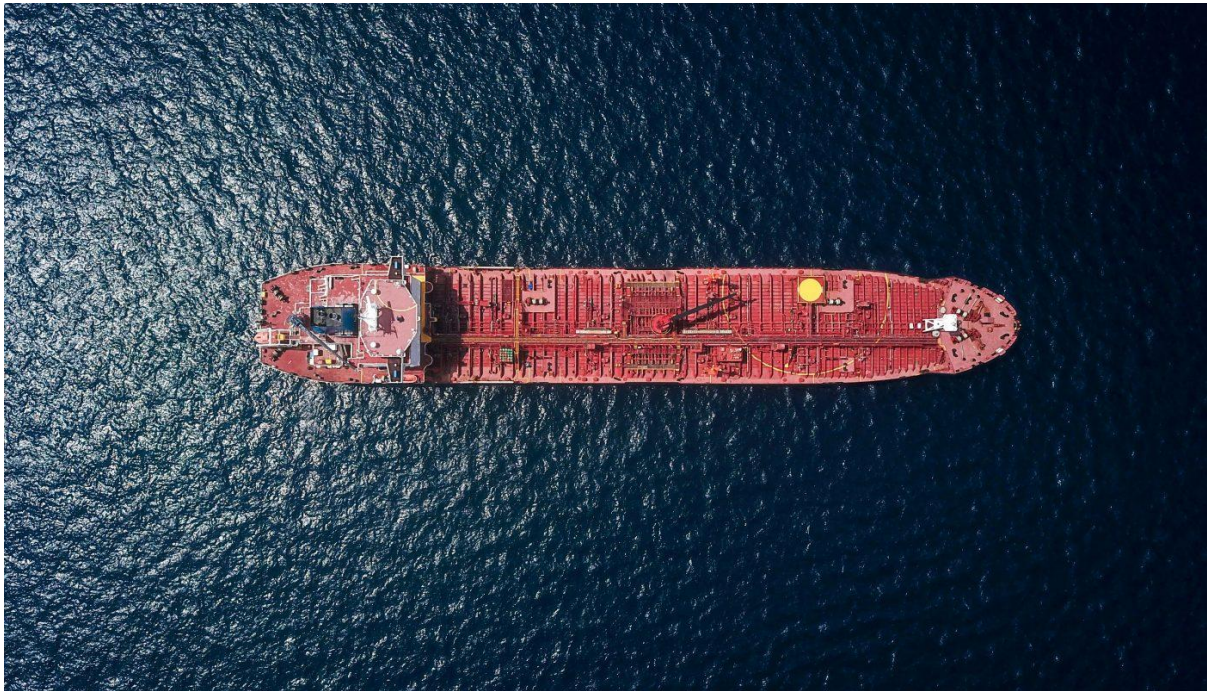


US tightens blockade against Venezuela, Mexico helps Cuba



Oil tanker (symbolic image): The US has announced a complete naval blockade around Venezuela – with consequences for Cuba (source: [Shaah Shahidh/Unsplash](#))

The United States has further tightened its naval blockade against Venezuela. According to [information provided](#) by a US government representative, the Coast Guard pursued a third tanker in the waters off the Venezuelan coast on Sunday. The US considers the tanker to be a “sanctioned shadow fleet vessel” sailing “under false colors” and subject to a court seizure order. With this latest escalation, the US also has Cuba in its sights.

Commando operation against Chinese tanker

On Saturday, US forces had already captured the tanker “Centuries” in international waters near Venezuela. During the nighttime operation, soldiers rappelled from military helicopters onto the ship, as Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem showed in a [video posted on X](#). According to the *AFP* news agency, the Panamanian-flagged ship belongs to the Hong Kong-based shipping company Centuries Shipping and was transporting 1.8 million barrels of Venezuelan crude oil to China.

However, the reasons given by the US for the hijacking operations repeatedly prove to be questionable. According to the International Maritime Organization, neither the “Centuries” nor the company are on any sanctions lists. “We will find you and we will stop you,” Noem said of the latest operation.

Third seizure within two weeks

This was already the third tanker seizure this month. On December 10, US units seized the oil tanker “Skipper” and took it to Houston, Texas.

On December 16, US President Donald Trump [ordered a](#) “total and complete blockade” of all oil tankers subject to sanctions that are heading to or leaving Venezuela. He now refers to Venezuela's government as a “foreign terrorist organization” and accused Venezuela of stealing land and oil from the US.

The Venezuelan government strongly condemned the seizures. Vice President Delcy Rodríguez spoke of a “serious act of piracy” and accused the US of “theft and kidnapping” as well as the “violent disappearance of the crew.” Caracas announced that it would file a complaint with the UN Security Council. Rodríguez stated that the US's sole objective was to force regime change and appropriate the world's largest oil reserves. However, she said that Washington's “colonialist model” would fail.

Venezuela is Cuba's most important oil supplier. The first of the recently seized tankers was loaded with oil deliveries for Cuba.

Growing international criticism

Since September, the US military has been attacking ships in the region that it suspects of drug smuggling. According to official figures, more than two dozen attacks on boats have killed over 100 people who, according to the US, had links to drug cartels. However, no evidence of this has been presented. Susan Wiles, White House chief of staff, announced in an interview with *Vanity Fair* magazine that Trump would “blow up boats” until Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro gave up. In an [interview with NBC News](#) broadcast on Friday, Trump also did not rule out war against Venezuela.

International criticism of Trump's actions is growing. Cuba repeatedly [denounced](#) the US's “state maritime terrorism” and called on the international community to intervene. Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva warned on Saturday of a “humanitarian catastrophe” for the entire region. Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum appealed to the United Nations on Friday to prevent bloodshed.

As the *New York Times* recently [reported](#), US Secretary of State Rubio is planning regime change in Venezuela, which could also include Cuba. Since the 1959 revolution, the socialist island has been considered by ultra-right hawks in the US to be the “root evil” of the Latin American left and is therefore likely to be the secret focus of the escalation in Venezuela.

Mexico steps into the breach for Cuba

In view of the tightening of the US blockade, Mexico has now provided Cuba with short-term support. According to the Energy Institute at the University of Texas, two ships from Mexico carrying a total of 80,000 barrels of fuel are on their way to Cuba.

The tankers “Ocean Mariner” and “Eugenia Gas,” both flying the Liberian flag, loaded their cargo at the Mexican state-owned Pajaritos facility. The “Eugenia Gas” is already sailing around the north coast of Cuba toward the port of Moa in the east of the island, [reported](#) the news agency *EFE*.

The 80,000 barrels supplied by the Mexican state oil company Pemex cover slightly more than the island's daily crude oil deficit. Cuba needs around 100,000 barrels for its basic energy needs, of which about 40,000 come from its own production. According to the Cuban statistics office ONEI, 60 percent of the fuel consumed on the island is imported, with 65 percent of the total demand being used for the country's thermal power plants.

The whole situation surrounding Venezuela comes at an inopportune time for Cuba, in the midst of a critical phase for the Cuban power grid. The country has been suffering from a severe energy crisis for three years due to frequent outages at outdated power plants and a lack of foreign currency to purchase fuel. Within twelve months, the national power grid experienced five complete and several partial collapses. Large parts of the country experience power outages lasting 20 or more hours a day. Meanwhile, the expansion of renewable energies is progressing more slowly than planned. This year, 41 of 51 [planned solar parks](#) were completed. ([Cubaheute](#))