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Will Cuba be the Next After Maduro?

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President Donald Trump has started to frame U.S. policy in Latin America through a tougher reading of the Monroe Doctrine. Some observers call this the “Donroe Doctrine,” reflecting his view that the Western Hemisphere is a region where Washington should assert control and limit the influence of hostile governments. In practice, this has meant a sharper focus on the region and a greater willingness to use coercive tools.

The U.S. raid in Venezuela and the capture of Nicolás Maduro marked a turning point. Within days of the operation, Trump openly floated the idea of military action against Colombia, saying it “sounds good,” and repeated his readiness to confront governments he views as problematic. Mexico received similar rhetoric, including an offer to send U.S. troops to fight criminal groups on Mexican soil. This was rejected outright by the Mexican President, Claudia Sheinbaum.

Similarly, Cuba has now moved to the center of Trump’s attention. Since the military operation on January 3, Trump has publicly urged Cuba to “make a deal, before it’s too late.” What that deal would involve remains unclear. Havana has little to offer Washington in concrete terms, and the White House has not explained what it expects in return. Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel responded in familiar language, declaring that Cuba is ready to defend itself “to the last drop of blood.”

Despite the heated rhetoric, a direct U.S. military intervention in Cuba remains unlikely. Trump himself has hinted as much, suggesting that the Cuban government could simply collapse without American troops ever setting foot on the island. The real leverage here is an economic, not a military, one.

No doubt, Maduro’s removal was a serious blow to Havana. For years, Cuba played a key role in sustaining the Venezuelan government by providing intelligence assistance, internal

security, and personal protection for Maduro. In exchange, Venezuela supplied Cuba with heavily subsidized oil, typically between thirty thousand and thirty-five thousand barrels per day. This support was essential for an island that needs roughly one hundred thousand barrels a day and produces less than half of that on its own.

Trump has now made clear that this arrangement is in jeopardy. He has stated that no more oil or money should flow from Venezuela to Cuba and has suggested that the U.S. military would help enforce that separation if necessary. American forces are already involved in a limited blockade of Venezuela's oil sector, intercepting sanctioned tankers and tightening restrictions. Extending that pressure to shipments bound for Cuba would be relatively easy and deeply damaging.

The loss of Venezuelan oil would push Cuba into a far more severe crisis. Even with limited supplies from Mexico and Russia, the island is already struggling with rolling blackouts, fuel shortages, a shrinking economy, and tightening political control. Cutting off what remains of Venezuela's support would intensify every one of these pressures.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio, now the administration's main point of contact on Venezuela and a long-time advocate of political change in Havana, has been explicit about his goals. For Rubio and many Florida Republicans, the fall of the Cuban government would represent the closing chapter of a Cold War struggle that has shaped U.S. policy for decades. The United States certainly has tools to increase pressure on Díaz-Canel and the Cuban leadership. But doing so would require sustained political commitment and carries no guarantee that what follows would serve U.S. interests.

Even if the regime collapses in Cuba, a quick shift to democracy is unlikely. The institutions needed for a transition are missing, and most opposition leaders are jailed or in exile, leaving no organized force ready to step in. Any collapse would leave a power vacuum, and Washington would have to confront the question of who fills it.

That uncertainty helps explain why Trump seems reluctant to consider a military option in Cuba. Allowing the system to weaken under economic pressure carries far less risk for the United States than taking responsibility for whatever might emerge after a sudden collapse.

When Trump talks about a “deal,” he is likely referring to a negotiated transition rather than a sudden collapse. The objective appears to be to push Cuba’s ruling elite to make a strategic choice to manage a controlled transition now, or face a far more chaotic breakdown later.

Such a negotiated transition would require concrete steps from the regime’s elites. That would mean releasing all political prisoners, allowing opposition parties to run and compete, and opening the economy to private investment. It would also require a clear and credible electoral calendar, with international observers in place.

Meanwhile, in any transition scenario, the role of the Revolutionary Armed Forces will be decisive. The FAR isn’t just the military, but it’s the most powerful institution in Cuba. It has a presence across the entire country, controls the use of force, and enjoys far more institutional credibility than the Communist Party itself.

If Cuba does change, the armed forces will survive the party. They would be the ones keeping order, mediating talks, and managing a controlled opening. Ultimately, everything depends on where the FAR decides to stand.

The real signals to watch in the coming months will come from the Trump administration. Any changes in U.S. military posture in the Caribbean and any concrete demands laid out by Rubio will matter far more than public rhetoric. For now, while the attention remains fixed on Venezuela and the post-Maduro era transition, the Trump administration may ultimately conclude that opening a new front in Cuba through military action is simply not worth the cost. Instead, the White House appears content to wait and watch as the regime slowly weakens under the increasing pressure.

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