



Will the Cuban revolution survive the storm of 2025?

 DANNY SHAW · JANUARY 1, 2025

Danny Shaw has been traveling to Cuba since 1995 in support of the country's socialist revolution. Unsatisfied with the official proclamations and guided tours for international leftists, he embarked on a project of first-hand ethnographic research across the country over the decades. With a command of Cuban Spanish, Shaw wandered off the beaten path, independently evaluating conditions in the country. Surveying the perspectives of some of the most marginalized populations in Havana, he assesses their responses to the US unilateral blockade and Cuba's isolation.

On Jan. 1, Cuba officially joined the international grouping known as BRICS, as one of 13 nations incorporated as “partner states.” The date, which coincides with the 66th anniversary of the triumph of their revolution, could mark a turning point for the beleaguered socialist state. But unless the country's leaders embrace a strategic fiscal shift in the face of an asphyxiating US blockade, the prospect of state collapse – and the unraveling of over a half century of revolutionary social development – can not be dismissed.

“Ataca Sabroso” (Attack With Sweetness)

Throughout my decades of firsthand research in Cuba, few figures seemed to embody the revolution — and all its contradictions — like “Sumy,” the boxer. A slender 6’ 2,” at 60 years old, he could still pass for 39. Known for a long, stiff jab that snapped heads back, the retired fighter turned long-time high school principal still has his dazzling punching combinations. For two decades, Jesús Miguel Rodríguez Muro, known by his nickname Sumy, glided through cruiserweight boxing competitions across Cuba. Internationally, he made a name for himself as well, fighting in the Soviet Union and other Warsaw Pact countries.

A dedicated member of the Cuban Communist Party, Sumy resides in Arroyo Naranjo, an outer municipality of Havana. The retired athlete lived as all Cubans do: modestly. During a recent visit, his feet swung off a small ramshackle bed. He had a collection of books and notebooks stacked on a bookshelf that was on its last leg. His bedroom, which moonlit as a living room, was furnished with a tiny TV straight out of the 1980s and a transistor radio that one might see in a Vietnam war movie. At night time, when hunger stirred and no protein was available, Sumy grabbed two pieces of cheap cake and tossed them into an empty loaf of bread. He devoured the make-shift stuffed gyro, winking at his boxing students: “Sabroso, sabroso!”



US intelligence exploits Cuban youth's malaise

The Cuban Revolution once guaranteed every citizen health care, education and basic social and economic rights. In Sumy's case, the shift could be clearly delineated by generation. Sumy's parents' generation made the revolution. Sumy's generation benefited from the social transformation and fortified it. But Sumy's children's generation, who came of age in the 1990s, have had a different experience. In the words of one mother and communist militant in Marianao: "The new generation has only lived in a period of sacrifice and more sacrifice. They don't remember the struggle against Batista nor the first decade of the revolution, with those marvelous debates and experiments we had at that time. They only know austerity."

The collapse can be felt throughout Cuba's economy, and perhaps nowhere more acutely than its critical sugar industry. Initially, collectivization proved immensely successful, with Cuba under Castro reaching a peak of 8.5 million metric tonnes of sugar between 1969 and 1970. In the early 90s, before the collapse of the Soviet Union, Cuban farmers still produced 7 million metric tons, accounting for a whopping 30% of global sugar exports. But the number fell by half virtually overnight as Cuba's friends abroad disappeared, and continued to dwindle in the intervening years.

The decline has become more pronounced in recent years, as the number of functioning sugar mills in Cuba has **dropped** to just 16, with US sanctions continuing to make repairs near-impossible. In 2019, the island managed to produce 1.3 million metric tons of sugar. By 2023, that number dropped to 350,000, with the island failing – for the first time since the 1800s – to produce enough sugar to provide for domestic consumption. As economist Juan Triana explained, it's difficult to overstate the significance of the massive dropoff in sugar: "For more than 150 years, the industry of sugarcane was both the main export income and the locomotive for the rest of the economy. That's what we've lost."

Tourism, which overtook sugar as Cuba's top industry in 1997, has nearly evaporated in the same recent span. Following the appearance of COVID, the island's visitors dropped from over 4,000,000 per year to just 356,500 in 2021.

Now, Cuba has neither the foreign revenue nor a self-reliant economy to feed its people. The island has been teetering on the brink of disaster since 1990; the start of the pandemic only exacerbated the situation. There are routine blackout **crises**. Gas shortages are frequent. A trip across Havana on public transportation can take three hours or more. Residents, fatigued by six and a half decades of a Cold War, are **demanding** "electricity and food." The imperialist Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) **forecasts** that this reality will spurn more protests. Rations **are** down to a bare minimum and even those are often not available. According to one doctor and Cuban Communist Party leader known by his nom de guerre, Oldanier: "We live like Palestinians minus the bombing. Malnutrition is everywhere. Inflation has skyrocketed. The state cannot pay our salaries. Child mortality is way up. More and more people are fleeing."

Cuba, like many nations targeted by the US for regime change, has seen a major exodus in recent years, with nearly half a million Cubans – representing a full 5% of the Cuban population – reportedly attempting to immigrate to the United States between 2021 and 2023.

The end of rations?

Before the aggravated crisis that began with the pandemic, every month, each member of a household in Cuba received a monthly “canasta básica” (basic basket) consisting of an allotment of rice, chickpeas, black beans, cooking oil, salt, sugar, coffee, soap, bread, eggs, chicken, tobacco, and toothpaste. Now, residents complain that portions have dropped significantly, rice arrives late, and chicken has vanished, replaced by cans of potted meat. If a family wants fruit, vegetables, or anything beyond la libreta (the ration book), it is up to their own individual spending ability. Families describe the creative artform of stretching a meager amount of food for the entire month, with one explaining how they saved up extra eggs for New Years Eve in order to be able to give their children some type of treat that night.

Cuba’s internationally-renowned medical sector, once the pride of Latin America, hasn’t been immune to the downturn either. “We cannot provide what is required for those with diabetes and other sick people,” one nurse lamented.

Due to shortages deliberately caused by the intensification of the trade embargo, Cuba’s inflation rate **is** an astronomical 39.1%. Access to dollars is the only way many people can eat. They can access the private Micro and Small Enterprises stores (MYPIMES) which sell food and other products at prices pegged to the dollar and euro. This means that to buy a pound of chicken in “the free market,” a Cuban will spend up to 20 percent of their monthly salary. For two weeks of milk, they may spend two weeks of their salary. Many Communist Party vets say these are their worst economic conditions yet. One community leader lamented: “We don’t have medication. I am a diabetic. We just keep losing weight. Look at these 25 pounds I have lost. Carlos Lazo’s Bridges of Love (Puentes de Amor) program **helps** us but it is not enough.”

With no indication that things will improve anytime soon, many Cubans – specifically, young adults – want out. Meanwhile, their blockaded futures provide fertile soil for the next color revolution attempt.

The younger generation of Cubans are mostly singing a different tune than Sumy and the revolutionary old guard. US intelligence is doing all it can to exploit the resentments of those elements which USAID branded as “desocialized and marginalized youth” from Afro-Cuban communities. As **Max Blumenthal reported** for The Grayzone, US intelligence has invested millions in a Cultural Cold War-style program to boost counterrevolutionary rappers, artists and activists.

The first wave of weaponized Cuban artists emerged from the so-called San Isidro Movement. I first met San Isidro founders Amaury Pacheco, Omni Zona Franca and some of the collective’s future activists in 2001 at poetry and music festivals in Alamar, Havana del Este. While these dreadlocked, anarchist-oriented performers claimed to be “non-ideological,” it was clear they were the kind of “dissidents” the CIA was courting to lead the counterrevolution. They were fiercely dedicated to toppling the Cuban state and eager to work with any foreigners who could help them travel internationally and advocate for a Western-style color revolution in Cuba.



OAS Secretary-General Luis Almagro with San Isidro Movement co-founder Amaury Pacheco (second from right) and other artists affiliated with the collective

In July 2021, the San Isidro Movement became the driving force behind unprecedented protests in cities across the country against the Cuban revolution and conditions on the island in July 2021. Though the demonstrations petered out quickly, and without the brute repression US media clearly hoped for, they triggered renewed calls for regime change from Western capitols. The Biden administration invoked the brief protest wave as justification for discarding Obama's move toward normalization with Havana.



*San Isidro member and reggae artist Sandor Pérez Pita, aka
Rassandino, with Marines inside the US embassy in Havana*

Destitution by design

The destruction of Cuba's economy represents an undeniable success of decades of US foreign policy. The Trump and Biden administrations ultimately remained faithful to the original objective of the 1960 blockade – as have those that preceded them, including that of Barack Obama, who only slightly **tweaked** certain stipulations restricting travel. A year after the revolution's triumph, Eisenhower **calculated**: "If the Cuban people are hungry, they will throw Castro out." Four months later, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Lester D. Mallory agreed: "Every possible means should be undertaken promptly to weaken the economic life of Cuba... to bring about hunger, desperation and overthrow of the government."

Drafted in 1960, the US government's "Program of Covert Action" continues to inform US policy towards Cuba. For six decades, the US has sought to suffocate and destroy Cuba's self-determination.

More than 3,400 Cubans have been **killed** by US state terrorism since the revolution. US intelligence plotted and organized 638 known attempts on Fidel Castro's life. Biological warfare has been used such as the intentional infection of the island's pig population with the swine virus. It is more difficult to calculate the human cost of sanctions. Hunger and migration are the two most common results. Over 200,000 Cubans have been forced to leave their homeland **in the past year and a half**, a figure even larger than previous migrations such as the Marielitos and the 1994 "rafters."

Every policy of today's most powerful empire has been calculated and designed to inflict regime change in Cuba, a euphemism for the complete overhaul of class relations. Ignoring these external pressures, the legacy media hyper fixates on repression in Cuba instead. The constant threats, harassment and US intelligence-backed terrorist campaigns have successfully instilled a level of paranoia in Cuban leadership, which has had to focus precious resources on national security. This defensive posture plays right into the hands of Cuba's would-be colonizers in Washington and Miami.

Whether it is framed as Biden's last hoorah or Trump's opening salvo, the US national security elite, drunk off its genocidal rampage across the Middle East, still wants to overthrow the Cuban government. On the island, rumors swirl that the US is planning another San Isidro-style color revolution attempt in hopes of provoking state repression. This would naturally pave the way for Elon Musk-aligned influencers and the corporate media to frame "Communist Cuba" as a bastion of repression and provide Washington with a justification to finish off the recalcitrant state.

Multipolarity: Cuba's only hope

The Cuban leadership, seasoned by six decades of resistance, is searching for a response to the hybrid war and its impact on morale. They respond as any fighter who is fighting above their weight does: aggressively and desperately. Now, it's become clear that their only way to break the blockade is multipolarity.

Visits back and forth between Chinese President Xi Jinping and his Cuban counterpart highlight Cuba's increasing resolve to build up their own Chinese style competitive state companies which would put an end to the food shortages. Cuba **hosted** the Group of 77 last year, the largest international organization after the United Nations itself. 134 countries, or 80 percent of the world population, are currently represented in the now misnamed "Group of 77." From Havana, chairman of the Group of 77, Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel, **insisted**: "After all this time that the North has organized the world according to its interests, it is now up to the South to change the rules of the game." Cuba, along with 34 other countries, has **applied** for membership in BRICS. The addition of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Ethiopia, the United Arab Emirates, Iran and Argentina (contested by the new president Milei) at the beginning of 2024, means the BRICS bloc nations now **constitute** 42% of the world's population and account for 23% of gross domestic product and 18% of global trade. Cuba's future does not run through Wall Street or the Beltway, it runs through Moscow, Beijing, Caracas, Tehran, Johannesburg and the other burgeoning centers of multipolarity.

President Diaz-Canel **visited** Iran to discuss mutually-beneficial ways to break the embargoes. The Deputy President Salvador Valdés Mesa **travelled** to South Africa to strengthen diplomatic and economic ties. On May 9th, the 79th anniversary of the Soviet Day of Victory over Fascism, the Cuban president celebrated with Vladimir Putin in the Grand Kremlin Palace. Cuba **hosted** a fleet of Russian warships in its harbors, just 500 miles from nuclear-powered US attack submarines which continue to occupy Guantanamo Bay.

One of Cuba's most malicious enemies, incoming Cuban-American Secretary of State Marco Rubio, has **warned** of the shifting geopolitical dimensions. Alarmed by Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's multipolar instincts and his visits to Beijing and beyond, the neoconservative Florida senator appeared anxious on **Fox** News: "We won't have to talk about sanctions in five years because there'll be so many countries transacting in currencies other than the dollar that we won't have the ability to sanction them." Could the "sanction inability" theory, as the Chinese Global Times calls it, spell relief for the Cuban people or is it too late? In theory, Cuba should no longer be an isolated state standing on its own. So why is this not translating into relief for the Cuban people?

Unfortunately for Cubans, you cannot yet feed your children nor fuel your cars with multipolarity. Capitalism demands instant gratification. And the average young Cuban knows there's far more to be found in Miami than Havana.

Argentinian sociologist Atilio Borón, analyzing the impact of Western sanctions on South American and Caribbean countries, explained that hunger was more dangerous than any weapons system that Washington could deploy. An air-tight blockade is inflicting acute hunger and despair on the over 11,000,000 people of Cuba. Supporters of Cuba and the leaders of the multipolar world have a responsibility to ask: Before the most powerful empire in history, how much longer can the revolution hold on?

Late rounds in Cuba's fight for survival

There are two January showdowns shaping up in the Caribbean. On January 1st 2025, the 66th anniversary of the revolution, Cuba will officially become a member of BRICS. On January 20th, Donald Trump and his cabinet of billionaires will take state power in the United States.

Trump **enacted** a further 243 coercive measures against Cuba when he assumed office in 2016. The

Biden administration continued to tighten the noose around Cuba. The US has not recognized Nicolas Maduro, Cuba's closest ally, as the president of Venezuela, instead designating right-wing opposition candidate Edmundo Gonzalez as the country's leader. This sets up a clash for inauguration day in Caracas on January 10th, 2025—which the US is looking to exploit.

This December, the Department of Defense **signed** an agreement with Trinidad and Tobago which allows them “to deploy forces to Trinidad and Tobago in the event of a “conflict” in Venezuela.” And another US-supported San Isidro-style color revolution attempt against Cuba is expected in the opening months of Trump's second term.

Fidel Castro **highlighted** the centrality of the ideological struggle, the showdown for the heart and soul of a people. On the 66th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution, many Habaneros are gripped with an acute sense that Western leftist tourists and solidarity activists have over-glorified their reality. Something has to give. Either the expanded BRICS nations will incorporate Cuba into their multipolar economic, political and diplomatic expansion or the vultures will finish Cuba off. There is no middle ground.

Cuba's fight for survival resembles the boxing career of Mohammed Ali. For the first three decades, the revolution was youthful, sharp, bold and invincible. Past generations of Cubans fought for Angola and **Syria**, stood with Grenada and the Sandinistas, admiring and emulating the heroes of the revolution. This generation faces hunger, despair and isolation, with the government outmatched by objective reality. With the collapse of the anti-capitalist rival pole of the Cold War era, Cuba has been left to fight on its own.

Multipolarity may be on the rise, but as the Western-backed genocide in Gaza and the setbacks suffered by the Axis of Resistance show, US hegemony has proven resilient. As in Ali's final rounds, exhausted, with its vulnerabilities exposed, the island nation still somehow miraculously pushes through, paying a long-term price as it weathers one punishing blow after another. Unlike a prize fighter, the descendants of José Martí and Fidel Castro do not have the option of giving up or retiring.