

*Major issues are not resolved
by speeches, but by decisions.*
Otto von Bismarck

Introduction

In the early stages of the new political cycle in the United States, Donald Trump's foreign policy is taking shape against an international backdrop marked by multiple simultaneous crises. The escalation of tensions in the Middle East, particularly regarding Iran, has reignited scenarios of direct confrontation and further strained an international system already characterised by competition between major powers and the proliferation of interconnected conflicts.

In this environment, US foreign policy appears to oscillate between the need to manage multiple open fronts and the temptation to reaffirm its capacity to intervene in different scenarios simultaneously¹.

However, beyond these traditional focal points, a complementary trend is beginning to emerge: the growing centrality of the immediate geographical environment. Recent statements by Trump regarding possible actions in the Caribbean, alongside references to measures aimed at controlling or exerting influence over neighbouring areas and symbolic gestures concerning the Gulf of Mexico, suggest that the Western Hemisphere may be regaining a prominent place on the US strategic agenda².

This reorientation does not necessarily imply a abandonment of other theatres, but it does point to a broader logic of action, in which geographical proximity regains renewed strategic value.

Within this framework, Cuba is once again emerging as a critical hub. Not only because of its persistent political singularity—as one of the longest-standing authoritarian regimes in the contemporary world—but also because of the convergence of internal and external dynamics that place it in a position of particular vulnerability.

¹ HOLLAND, S et al. "Trump says Iran war's core objectives near completion", *Reuters*. 1 April 2026. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/trump-says-us-could-end-iran-war-two-three-weeks-2026-03-31>

Note: All hyperlinks are active as of 8 April 2026.

² *THE GUARDIAN*. "Trump suggests US could carry out 'friendly takeover' of Cuba". 27/2/26. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2026/feb/27/trump-cuba-regime-change>

The island is undergoing a structural energy crisis that has led to recurrent power cuts, shortages of supplies and a progressive deterioration in living conditions. This context has fuelled growing social discontent which, from the protests of recent years to more recent episodes of unrest, reflects a gradual erosion of the regime's ability to channel the population's demands³.

Added to this internal fragility is a less visible but strategically relevant factor: the existence of contacts and channels of communication between Washington and Havana which, although discreet, point to the persistence of avenues for negotiation even in a context of high tension.

Recent decisions relating to energy supplies—such as the temporary easing of certain restrictions—illustrate this duality between pressure and pragmatism⁴.

In this sense, the apparent contradiction between forceful rhetoric and tactical adjustments should not be interpreted as inconsistency, but rather as the expression of a strategy based on ambiguity and the simultaneous management of incentives and coercion.

The question that arises, therefore, transcends the Cuban case itself. In a global context characterised by the accumulation of crises—from the Middle East to Eastern Europe—and by the growing interdependence between regional scenarios, one might ask whether the renewed focus on the Caribbean responds solely to short-term dynamics or whether, on the contrary, it forms part of a deeper reconfiguration of the US strategic space.

In other words, one might ask whether we are witnessing an expansion of the repertoire of action in its immediate environment, where Cuba could become a case study for understanding the emerging logics of power, pressure and negotiation in the Western Hemisphere.

³ MURGUÍA, S. 'Discontent in Cuba begins to take shape with pot-banging protests and student assemblies'. *El País*. 27/2/26. Available at: <https://elpais.com/us/2026-03-10/el-descontento-en-cuba-empieza-a-tomar-forma-con-cacerolazos-y-asambleas-estudiantiles.html>

⁴ NARANJO, A. 'Russian Oil Tanker Enters Anchorage of Cuba's Matanzas Port', *Reuters*. 31/3/26. Available at: <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2026-03-31/russian-oil-tanker-enters-anchorage-of-cubas-matanzas-port-ship-data-say>

Pressure, ambiguity and US foreign policy

Beyond specific cases, US foreign policy in the current climate appears to follow a pattern of action characterised by a combination of pressure, tactical flexibility and strategic ambiguity. Under Donald Trump's leadership, this approach does not constitute a complete break with previous dynamics, but it does introduce greater intensity in the simultaneous use of coercive instruments and channels of negotiation, creating an environment of calculated uncertainty for the actors involved.

Furthermore, this approach does not operate in a vacuum. Recent developments in US national security strategy reflect a growing concern over the simultaneous nature of threats and the need to strengthen its position in areas considered priorities.

In this context, the Western Hemisphere—and, in particular, the Caribbean region—re-emerges as an area of direct strategic interest, not only for historical reasons, but also due to its geographical proximity, its impact on energy security and its relevance in terms of regional stability⁵.

At this point, an element emerges that has taken on increasing weight in the Administration's discourse and practice: the idea that the Caribbean is 'too close to be indifferent'. Geographical proximity ceases to be a structural fact and becomes an operational criterion that guides priorities, resources and political attention⁶.

Trump's references to the need to 'regain control' over the immediate neighbourhood, as well as his allusions to possible actions in the Gulf of Mexico or the Caribbean arc⁷, point to a revival of the traditional logic, according to which the neighbourhood constitutes a natural sphere of influence and, therefore, an area where tolerance for instability is minimal.

Far from being a secondary theatre, the Caribbean is today a space where very specific

⁵ THE WHITE HOUSE. *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. Washington, D.C., November 2025. Available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf>

⁶ REYES RAMÍREZ, Rocío de los. *Trump, Colombia and Venezuela: the return of the Monroe Doctrine?* IEEE Analysis Paper 69/2025. Available at: <https://www.defensa.gob.es/ceseden/-/ieeee/trump-colombia-y-venezuela>

⁷ VIDAL LIY, Macarena. 'Trump suggests that the US anti-drug operation in the Caribbean will move into a new phase on land', *El País*. 5/10/25 (accessed from archive).

factors converge: the structural crisis in countries such as Cuba, the presence of external actors—particularly Russia and China—and the growing perception in Washington that the weakening of the regional environment has direct consequences for national security⁸.

This combination of internal vulnerability and geopolitical competition reinforces the idea that the Caribbean functions, for the Administration, as a sort of hemispheric *mare nostrum* whose stability must be preserved even in a context of global overload.

Within this framework, US policy appears to be shifting towards greater focus and capacity for intervention in its immediate neighbourhood, which reduces the scope for viewing this region as a peripheral front.

One of the most visible features of this pattern is the coexistence of forceful rhetoric with decisions that, on the surface, qualify or even contradict it.

In the case of Cuba, for example, statements regarding possible changes on the island or scenarios involving increased pressure have coincided with specific decisions, such as the one-off authorisation of energy supplies from abroad⁹.

This duality should not be interpreted as a lack of coherence, but rather as a means of increasing the capacity to exert pressure without completely closing the door to negotiation.

Added to this logic is a second defining element: the proliferation of fronts of action. The simultaneous nature of tensions across different scenarios—from the Middle East, with the focus on Iran, to the Western Hemisphere itself—not only reflects the complexity of the international environment, but also sets clear limits on the US's capacity to sustain a multi-pronged strategy.

¹⁰In this context, the accumulation of initiatives and statements may reinforce the

⁸ ELLIS, R. E. 'The US National Security Strategy for 2025 and the Western Hemisphere: Implications and Challenges'. R. Evan Ellis, PhD, 2/4/26. Available at: <https://revanellis.com/la-estrategia-de-seguridad-nacional-de-ee-uu-para-2025-y-el-hemisferio-occidental-implicaciones-y-desafios>

⁹ SOLDATKIN, V. and ANTONOV, D. "Russian oil tanker arrives in Cuba as Moscow vows to stand by Havana", *Reuters*. 30 March 2026. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/russian-oil-tanker-has-arrived-cuba-interfax-reports-2026-03-30/>

¹⁰ CBC NEWS. "Trump says 'core strategic objectives' in Iran are nearing completion, without providing a precise timeline". 1 April 2026. Available at: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/trump-iran-update-speech-9.7150448>

perception of leadership, but it also introduces the risk of strategic overextension.

Finally, strategic ambiguity emerges as a central instrument. The lack of clear definitions regarding the actual scope of certain statements—including those relating to Cuba or the Caribbean as a whole—is not necessarily a void, but rather a tool that allows Washington to keep various options for action open.

This ambiguity increases the pressure on the actors involved, by making it difficult to anticipate specific moves, and consolidates a dynamic in which coercion, deterrence and negotiation are combined simultaneously.

In the case of the Caribbean, this ambiguity is reinforced by proximity: the closer the theatre, the greater the United States' ability to modulate signals, time its moves and alternate between threats and pragmatism without having to commit to a single strategy.

Cuba at a turning point: internal crisis and strategic pressure

Within the framework described, Cuba cannot be analysed solely as a system in crisis, but as a space in which the ongoing transformations in US foreign policy are particularly visible.

The island lies at the intersection of internal vulnerability, external pressure and strategic experimentation, making it a particularly revealing case for understanding the emerging dynamics in the Western Hemisphere. In other words, Cuba has become a stage where



the United States' behaviour in its immediate neighbourhood is being tested in real time.

The crisis the country is undergoing—with the energy dimension being its most visible manifestation—is not an isolated phenomenon, but a cumulative process that has progressively eroded the regime's ability to maintain its stability.

Figure 1. Protests in Cuba. Own creation

Recurring power cuts, shortages of supplies and the deterioration of living conditions have disrupted the traditional balances on which the system relied, weakening its capacity to absorb social tensions¹¹. In practice, this means something very specific: greater difficulties in daily life, more accumulated frustration and less scope for the system to manage the discontent.

In this context, the population's weariness ceases to be a latent factor and becomes a politically significant one, influencing both the country's domestic governance and its international standing¹².

Added to this dynamic is a growing loss of administrative efficiency and the capacity to sustain basic distribution networks, which turns this vulnerability into a structural feature of the system.

The disconnect between social expectations and the government's response introduces an additional level of pressure that limits the state's ability to project strength, both internally and externally.

At this point, internal fragility ceases to be a domestic matter and becomes a vector of foreign policy: the more weakened the system is, the greater the capacity for influence of external actors, especially when they operate from a position of structural advantage, as is the case with the United States.

However, what gives the Cuban situation particular strategic significance is not only the depth of its crisis, but the way in which this interacts with US foreign policy.

Since February 2026, the confirmation of contacts between Havana and the Donald Trump administration has shown that bilateral relations have entered a phase characterised by the simultaneous application of pressure and negotiation¹³. This interaction does not follow a linear logic, but rather a pattern in which Cuba's structural

¹¹ REUTERS. "Russian oil tanker arrives in Cuba as Moscow vows to stand by Havana". 30/3/26. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/russian-oil-tanker-has-arrived-cuba-interfax-reports-2026-03-30/>

¹² COLOMBO, M. "Power cuts, hunger and repression: the humanitarian crisis facing the Cuban people that is pushing the dictatorship to the brink of collapse", *Infobae*. 31/1/26. Available at: <https://www.infobae.com/america/america-latina/2026/01/31/cortes-de-luz-hambre-y-represion-el-drama-humanitario-del-pueblo-cubano-que-pone-a-la-dictadura-al-borde-del-colapso/>

¹³ LA NACIÓN. 'Recent updates on Cuba: what Donald Trump has said about Marco Rubio and contacts with the regime'. 17/2/26. Available at: <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/estados-unidos/actualizaciones-recientes-sobre-cuba-y-que-ha-dicho-donald-trump-de-marco-rubio-y-los-contactos-con-nid17022026>

weakness increases its exposure to asymmetric negotiation, in which the island's room for manoeuvre is constrained by its energy and economic dependence.

In essence, the Caribbean nation negotiates from a position of necessity, with very limited room for manoeuvre, whilst the United States does so from a position of freedom of action.

The combination of rhetorical pressure and the selective opening of diplomatic channels is not an anomaly, but an emerging pattern in US foreign policy towards its immediate neighbours. The calculated coexistence of messages of strength and signals of willingness to engage in dialogue allows for the modulation of intervention without committing to a single strategy, creating an environment in which the weaker party is forced to react to signals that are not always consistent with one another.

And that is precisely where its effectiveness lies: in not making it clear what the next step will be. Uncertainty, in this case, functions as a tool of attrition: it forces the regime to prepare simultaneously for various scenarios—from an abrupt hardening of stance to a one-off easing of restrictions—thereby consuming political and administrative resources that are already scarce.

The unfolding of events throughout 2026 reinforces this interpretation. Trump's statements suggesting that Cuba is 'desperate' to reach an agreement not only reflect a perceived position of strength, but also help to construct a discursive framework in which the negotiations take place against a backdrop of explicit asymmetry¹⁴.

At the same time, the opening of direct channels of dialogue between Washington and Havana, against a backdrop of an energy crisis, confirms that these negotiations are not hypothetical, but are in fact taking place.

In this sense, bilateral interaction ceases to be merely rhetorical and becomes an ongoing process, driven by the island's internal urgency. In other words, these are not hypothetical scenarios, but a dynamic that is already underway.

The analytical key lies, however, in the subsequent sequence of events. Trump's statements at the end of March, in which he asserted that 'Cuba is next', introduce an

¹⁴ MOLINA GÓMEZ, I. 'Trump claims Cuba is "desperate" to reach an agreement with the United States', *Huffpost*, 6 March 2026. Available at: <https://www.huffingtonpost.es/global/trump-afirma-cuba-esta-desesperada-llegar-acuerdo-estados-unidos-f202603.html>

element of escalation that significantly broadens the range of possible scenarios¹⁵. Although these statements do not translate into immediate action, their effect is clear: they alter perceptions of risk, increase pressure on the Cuban regime and redefine the framework within which the negotiations are taking place.

However, this move is followed by an apparently contradictory shift, when Trump himself downplays the importance of Russian oil supplies, stating that Cuba ‘has to survive’¹⁶.

Far from being an inconsistency, this oscillation could constitute one of the most revealing elements of the current pattern of US behaviour. The alternation between threat and pragmatism would not be a matter of improvisation, but rather a logic of strategic ambiguity seeking to maximise influence whilst keeping multiple options open.

In this framework, uncertainty is not a side effect, but a deliberate instrument that shapes the behaviour of the weakest link. Because, in such contexts, uncertainty can be as effective as direct pressure.

The combination of internal crisis, external dependence and geographical proximity makes Cuba a particularly suitable setting for the application of strategies that combine coercion, incentives and the management of uncertainty¹⁷. The perception of unpredictability—noted even by actors within the Cuban political sphere—reinforces this dynamic by making it difficult to anticipate moves and increasing the psychological pressure on the system¹⁸.

Ultimately, what is at stake goes beyond the Cuban case. The island’s situation allows us to observe how the internal vulnerability of one state can become a central vector of another’s foreign policy, particularly in a context where the immediate geographical environment is regaining strategic relevance.

¹⁵ *EL ECONOMISTA*. “Trump threatens Havana again and warns that ‘Cuba is next’”. 28 March 2026. Available at: <https://www.eleconomista.com.mx/internacionales/cuba-siguiente-trump-lanza-amenaza-presume-exito-intervenciones-militares-20260327-806306.html>

¹⁶ EFE. “Trump says he doesn’t mind Cuba receiving Russian oil: ‘They have to survive’”. 30 March 2026. Available at: <https://efe.com/mundo/2026-03-30/ee-uu-cuba-trump-rusia/>

¹⁷ LEOGRANDE, William M. *Cuba’s Response to U.S. Pressure: Adapting to a New Strategic Environment*. Washington Office on Latin America, Washington, DC, 2023.

¹⁸ CASTRO, Sandro. ‘Trump is an unpredictable person’, *Cibercuba*. 1 April 2026. Available at: <https://www.cibercuba.com/noticias/2026-04-01-u1-e42839-s27061-nid324656-sandro-castro-trump-persona-impredecible>

Cuba is therefore not merely a crisis-stricken setting, but also an indicator of how relations between power, proximity and the capacity for intervention are being reconfigured in the Western Hemisphere, where both factors become decisive in the projection of power. Put another way, Cuba is no longer just another case, but a problem that the United States cannot afford to ignore in its own neighbourhood.

In this sense, the evolution of the Cuban crisis acts as a barometer of US foreign policy: it reveals the extent to which Washington is prepared to combine pressure, negotiation and ambiguity in a space where every move has immediate consequences.

Rather than an isolated episode, Cuba thus becomes a key element in understanding how the United States operates when acting in its strategic neighbourhood.

When foreign policy begins at home

However, this analysis remains incomplete without incorporating the US domestic dimension. The oscillation between pressure and pragmatism cannot be understood solely as a strategy devised by the White House, but rather as the result of an internal political ecosystem in which electoral interests, legislative actors with their own agendas, and networks of influence rooted in key communities converge.

The discourse on Cuba, the timing of pressure and the selection of messages projected abroad are deeply shaped by internal dynamics that determine both the Administration's room for manoeuvre and its incentives.

The presence of legislative figures with the power to set the agenda, the influence of *the Cuban lobby* in Florida, and the centrality of the Hispanic vote in a highly competitive electoral cycle introduce variables that not only influence the formulation of policy towards Cuba, but also help to explain the very logic of strategic ambiguity observed in recent months.



Figure 2. Cuban-American mobilisation at a Donald Trump rally in Florida. Source: Alan Diaz/AP Photo

In this regard, policy towards Cuba operates simultaneously on two fronts: the international and the domestic. On the former, Washington exerts pressure, sends signals of strength and keeps the door open for tactical adjustments. On the latter, the Administration must respond to a network of domestic actors who not only shape the tone of the discourse, but also set the limits on any action.

This dual dimension explains why certain decisions—such as temporarily easing energy supplies or toning down rhetoric—cannot be interpreted solely as gestures towards Havana, but also as messages aimed at domestic audiences.

As various studies on US foreign policy point out, foreign policy is not the exclusive result of a coherent doctrinal line, but rather of the interplay of electoral pressures, organised interests and institutional dynamics that shape the room for manoeuvre of any¹⁹ administration.

In this context, the influence of certain territories and political actors proves decisive. Florida is the most obvious example. The concentration of the Cuban-American

¹⁹ MAJOR, Samuel. *The influence of John J. Mearsheimer on US foreign policy from 2009 to 2021*. CESEDEN, Ministry of Defence, 2025. Available at: <https://www.defensa.gob.es/ceseden/-/esfas/influencia-john-mearsheimer-politica-exterior-estadounidense-de-2009-2021>

population, its capacity for mobilisation and its electoral significance make policy towards Cuba a factor with a direct impact on national political competition.

The demonstrations organised in Miami following episodes of repression on the island, the exile caravans and the constant pressure from organisations such as the Cuban American National Foundation or Inspire America have reinforced expectations of a hardline stance²⁰. This creates a clear incentive to maintain a firm stance towards the Cuban government, even when the practical management of the relationship requires varying degrees of flexibility²¹.

Added to this territorial dimension is the role of bureaucracies and the institutional spaces in which foreign policy is shaped. The State Department, the National Security Council, Congress and federal agencies do not act in unison: each responds to different incentives, its own organisational culture and specific external pressures.

Policy towards Cuba thus becomes an arena where diplomatic priorities, security calculations, legislative interests and electoral considerations converge.

Institutional fragmentation—a structural feature of the US system—generates dynamics of competition between agencies and political actors that produce contradictory signals and decisions which, viewed from the outside, may appear improvised or incoherent²².

The influence of figures with the power to shape the agenda has been reinforced by Marco Rubio's arrival at the State Department. Since January 2025, Rubio has held the post of Secretary of State, bringing to the heart of the Executive a vision shaped by his political career in Florida and his longstanding engagement with the Cuban-American electorate.

²⁰ HANSEN, Lena. 'Protests and police brutality continue in Cuba. Miami is also taking to the streets', *People*. 14/7/21. Available at: <https://peopleenespanol.com/noticias/siguen-protestas-violencia-policia-cuba-manifestaciones-florida-washington-por-libertad-democracia-pueblo-cubano/>

²¹ ECKSTEIN, Susan. *The Immigrant Divide: How Cuban Americans Changed the U.S. and Their Homeland*. Routledge, Chapters 3 (Cuban American Politics) and 4 (The Power of the Cuban American Lobby), 2009, pp. 63–122.

²² BRANDS, Hal. *What Good Is Grand Strategy?* Cornell University Press, chaps. 1 (The Problem of Grand Strategy), 2 (The Uses and Limits of Grand Strategy) and 6 (Grand Strategy and American Statecraft), 2014, pp. 1–58 and 181–200.

His initial decisions—the review of the easing of restrictions adopted in previous years, the strengthening of coordination with the Treasury Department on sanctions, and the insistence on maintaining diplomatic pressure—have consolidated a framework for action that combines rhetorical firmness with tactical adjustments aimed at managing risks of instability.

Rubio has publicly reiterated this line, as he did prior to his appointment, for example in his statement of 10 July 2023, in which he urged maintaining pressure on the Cuban government²³. Other figures, such as Congresswoman María Elvira Salazar and Representative Carlos Giménez, have reinforced this line, articulating a discourse that combines identity, historical memory and electoral calculation²⁴.

Added to this is a further element: policy towards Cuba also functions as symbolic politics. It is directed not only at Havana, but also at domestic audiences who interpret every gesture as a sign of political identity.

In this cycle, the president's speeches at rallies in Florida, repeated references to the 'regime' in official addresses, and the use of Cuba as an example of ideological confrontation form part of a repertoire designed to strengthen the cohesion of his electoral base²⁵.

As recent reports show, part of this community interprets the president's gestures as signs of firmness, whilst another reads them as expressions of a style of power reminiscent of the island's own political history²⁶.

²³ RUBIO, Marco. 'Rubio Urges Administration to Maintain Pressure on Cuba', *U.S. Senate Press Release*. 7 October 2023. Available at: <https://www.rubio.senate.gov/news/press-releases/rubio-urges-administration-to-maintain-pressure-on-cuba/>

²⁴ SALAZAR, M. A. 'Salazar, Díaz-Balart, and Giménez Demand Strong Enforcement of U.S. Sanctions Against Cuban Regime', *Public*, Press release. 2 November 2026. Available at: <https://ebs.publicnow.com/view/A83ED8F0260A46022E5A8F32B653769B518D2EBA>

²⁵ FRANCE 24. "A 'friendly takeover' or not? Trump revives his rhetoric on Cuba from Florida". 26 March 2010. Available at: <https://www.france24.com/es/am%C3%A9rica-latina/20260310-toma-amistosa-o-no-trump-revive-su-ret%C3%B3rica-sobre-cuba-desde-florida>

²⁶ COLOMÉ, C. G. "Cubans in Florida, divided after nine months of Trump in power: 'He acts like Fidel'", *El País*. 25 September 2018. Available at: <https://elpais.com/us/2025-09-08/los-cubanos-de-florida-divididos-tras-nueve-meses-de-trump-en-el-poder-actua-como-fidel.htm>

In this sense, policy towards Cuba operates simultaneously as foreign policy and as domestic policy, which explains its highly instrumental nature.

This internal framework helps to explain the apparent contradiction that characterises recent policy towards the island. The coexistence of a tough rhetoric—aimed at satisfying domestic political expectations—with pragmatic decisions—necessary to avoid scenarios of instability—does not stem from inconsistency, but from the need to operate simultaneously at different levels. Strategic ambiguity is not only a tool for external relations, but also a mechanism for managing tensions within the political system itself.

Understanding this dual logic is essential for interpreting both the volatility of the rhetoric and the apparent contradiction between threats and pragmatism that has characterised bilateral relations in recent months.

What Cuba anticipates

Recent developments in the Cuban crisis not only allow us to interpret the island's current situation, but also raise a question that runs through the entire debate: to what extent might the situation escalate into more intense forms of pressure or even some form of intervention.

This question, which features in both political discourse and public perception, does not arise in isolation, but rather as a result of the accumulation of factors that have been analysed: internal deterioration, external pressure and the growing prominence of the Caribbean on the US agenda.

Cuba is not a secondary issue: its proximity, its symbolic significance and its immediate impact on Florida keep it within Washington's constant sphere of attention. In this context, the Caribbean island serves as a space where these dynamics converge in a particularly visible manner.

The combination of economic fragility, the energy crisis and political sensitivity in the United States makes Cuba a leading indicator of how the relationship between Washington and its immediate neighbourhood might evolve. This is not merely a national crisis, but a scenario that shapes broader strategic decisions.

One of the most significant factors is the growing role of Cuban society as a political factor. Protests, spontaneous outbursts and the circulation of alternative information have shown that state control, though persistent, is no longer sufficient to absorb the accumulated discontent.

The government's recent decision to pardon more than 2,000 prisoners as a 'humanitarian gesture'²⁷ reflects precisely this need to ease tensions in a context where social pressure has ceased to be sporadic and has become structural.

At the same time, public statements by the Cuban president, Miguel Díaz-Canel, have emphasised the defence of sovereignty and the condemnation of any external interference, revealing a twofold concern: to contain internal erosion and to prevent the crisis from being perceived from the outside as an opportunity for others to intervene²⁸.

For the United States, these dynamics are not a secondary issue. Cuba's internal developments have direct implications in areas such as migration, maritime security and regional stability, particularly in a context where Florida remains a politically sensitive area. Cuba does not occupy the centre of the global agenda, but it does have an immediate impact on the US strategic environment.

The energy dimension reinforces this interpretation. Widespread blackouts — such as the one recorded on 3 April 2026, when more than 50% of the country was simultaneously left without electricity²⁹ — not only affect daily life, but also erode the state's legitimacy and amplify social discontent.

The inability to guarantee a basic service turns energy into a vector of instability that transcends the domestic sphere. For Washington, this fragility acts as a risk indicator: not in military terms, but as a factor that can trigger dynamics that are difficult to contain.

Added to this is a recent development that illustrates the kind of involvement the United States is prepared to undertake in the short term. The presence of the FBI in Cuba to

²⁷ SHERWOOD, Dave and FUENTES, Mario. 'Cuba begins releasing prisoners under scrutiny of rights groups, US government', *Reuters*. 3 April 2026, Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/cuba-begins-releasing-prisoners-under-scrutiny-rights-groups-us-govt-2026-04-03/>

²⁸ GILBERT, Albert. "Cuba and the 'zero option': the Díaz-Canel government's impossible plan to resist the US blockade", *El Periódico*. 15/2/26. Available at: <https://www.elperiodico.com/es/internacional/20260215/cuba-opcion-cero-plan-imposible-gobierno-diaz-canel-resistir-cerco-eeuu-126813778>

²⁹ EFE. "Power cuts will leave up to 53% of Cuba without electricity at any one time this Friday." 3 April 2026. Available at: <https://efe.com/mundo/2026-04-03/apagones-53-porcentaje-cuba-viernes/>

investigate the attack on a vessel from Florida³⁰ highlights a logic of limited, ad hoc and operational intervention.

Such actions do not constitute a strategy of open confrontation, but they do reflect a growing intertwining of internal security and foreign policy in a region where geographical proximity blurs the boundaries between the two spheres.

At the same time, the political discourse in Washington continues to oscillate between pressure and containment. The statements by Secretary of State Marco Rubio —“the only thing worse than a communist is an incompetent communist”—not only express an ideological position, but also serve as a reminder that certain sectors of the government seek to set limits on any rapprochement with Havana, rather than opening up avenues for negotiation³¹.

The accumulation of external crises has begun to take a visible toll on American society. The protracted nature of conflicts in various regions, the impact of tensions in the Middle East on energy prices, and the rising cost of living have fuelled a sense of saturation that shapes any debate on foreign engagement.

The experience accumulated over recent decades has reinforced the idea that interventions tend to drag on, become more expensive and shift their costs to the domestic sphere, particularly in the form of energy inflation and pressure on purchasing power.

In this context, any course of action regarding Cuba is assessed not only in geopolitical terms, but also in terms of its immediate effect on the average voter, which places a clear limit on Washington's willingness to bear new political costs³².

Unlike other, more distant scenarios, geographical proximity amplifies this perception of risk: a crisis on the island could quickly lead to migration pressure, tensions in Florida or

³⁰ DW. “FBI in Cuba to investigate incident involving armed boat”. 2 April 2026. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/es/fbi-est%C3%A1-en-cuba-para-investigar-incidente-con-lancha-armada-procedente-de-eeuu/a-76644823>

³¹ 14 y MEDIO. “Marco Rubio on Cuba: The only thing worse than a communist is an incompetent communist”. 27/3/26. Available at: https://www.14ymedio.com/cuba/marco-rubio-cuba-unica-cosa_1_1125135.html

³² SMELTZ, Dina *et al.* “The Growing Partisan Divide on U.S. Foreign Policy”, *Chicago Council on Global Affairs*. 2026. Available at: <https://globalaffairs.org/research/public-opinion-survey/2025-survey-public-opinion-us-foreign-policy>

economic repercussions that are felt in the short term.

Consequently, the central question is no longer whether the United States can intervene, but rather under what conditions it could do so without incurring a political cost that would be difficult to manage. The combination of public fatigue, economic sensitivities and electoral pressure acts as a restraining factor that limits the scope for any direct escalation, even in a context of growing strategic pressure.

This climate does not imply an automatic retreat, but it does introduce clear constraints. Cuba thus finds itself in an ambivalent position: significant enough not to be ignored, but not a high enough priority to justify open intervention in a context of international overload and internal economic pressure.

This tension helps to explain the type of approach that is taking shape: sustained pressure, selective contacts and targeted responses aimed at avoiding scenarios of further destabilisation.

Within this framework, the possibility of direct intervention on the island remains, for the time being, unlikely. However, the relevant issue is not so much its immediacy as its gradual normalisation in public debate.

The combination of political statements, internal deterioration and a perceived window of opportunity has shifted the boundaries of what is conceivable, incorporating scenarios that until recently lay outside the scope of analysis. It is not that intervention is imminent, but rather that it is no longer considered beyond the realm of the plausible³³.

This logic is not limited to bilateral relations. The regional environment views the evolution of the Cuban crisis as an indicator of the extent to which Washington is prepared to combine pressure, cooperation and direct involvement in the interests of stability.

This development is taking place in a hemispheric context where other actors are closely monitoring the Cuban case. Countries such as Venezuela and Haiti interpret the US

³³ This phenomenon of shifting public discourse is known in political science as the Overton Window. The concept describes how an idea shifts from being considered radical or unthinkable to being perceived as a legitimate and debatable option as it is repeatedly introduced into media and political debate. For further reading on this model of narrative normalisation, see: Mackinac Center for Public Policy: The Overton Window. <https://www.mackinac.org/7504>

handling of the crisis as a signal regarding the actual scope of Washington's action.

The Caribbean, as a whole, perceives that geographical proximity and internal fragility can trigger responses that are faster, more flexible and less visible than in other scenarios.



Figure 3. The Caribbean as America's *mare nostrum*. Own creation

Ultimately, what Cuba anticipates is not a specific outcome, but a course of action. The island has become a testing ground for a strategy based on calibrated pressure, targeted interventions and strategic ambiguity that avoids irreversible commitments.

This approach does not seek to resolve the crisis, but rather to prevent it from escalating into scenarios that are difficult to contain in an environment that the United States cannot afford to ignore. Because in the Caribbean, crises rarely erupt suddenly, but they can become unmanageable.

Conclusion

Seen in perspective, US foreign policy towards the Caribbean — and towards Cuba in particular — appears to be moving away from the inertia of 'routine isolation' towards a

phase of opportunistic and multidimensional activism.

This shift does not stem from a linear design, but from the convergence of a systemic crisis on the island and an administration in Washington which, in an international environment saturated with open fronts, has rediscovered geographical proximity not as a logistical burden, but as an operational advantage.

In a political cycle marked by simultaneous crises, the Caribbean re-emerges as a region where the rapidity of effects and domestic sensitivities compel action with a blend of firmness and flexibility.

The gradual normalisation of the debate on intervention—in any of its forms, from extreme diplomatic pressure to scenarios of rupture—should not be interpreted as the announcement of imminent action. Rather, it responds to the construction of a deterrence and preconditioning architecture that deliberately shifts the boundary of the ‘unthinkable’.

By combining high-intensity rhetoric with strategic ambiguity, Washington regains an initiative it had lost in other scenarios, forcing the Cuban government to manage its survival under the permanent shadow of options that previously lay outside rational analysis.

At the same time, this renewed focus on the immediate region serves a broader geopolitical function: the containment of extra-regional actors at a time of global competition. The reinforcement of US influence in the Caribbean arc sends an unequivocal signal regarding the continued relevance of zones of vital interest.

Cuba thus ceases to be a relic of the Cold War and becomes the laboratory where new logics of hemispheric power are tested, based on surgical sanctions, discreet channels of communication and sustained pressure aimed at forcing tactical adjustments that guarantee the stability of the Gulf of Mexico.

The success of this approach will depend on the US administration’s ability to balance its projection of force with the pragmatism required to prevent the pressure from leading to an uncontrolled collapse with migratory or humanitarian consequences that would be difficult to absorb.

But what seems certain is that the Caribbean is no longer a peripheral front. In a world where the simultaneity of crises is redefining strategic priorities, Washington appears to have accepted that, in order to project power globally, it must first unambiguously secure its hegemony in its own *mare nostrum*.

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