

# Washington Slams Cuba's Doctors as US Embargo Blocks Coronavirus Aid

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*The coronavirus pandemic is exposing the cruelty of US imperialism to the world as Washington's crippling economic sanctions remain in full effect. The decades-old US embargo on Cuba [blocked a coronavirus aid shipment](#) from a Chinese entrepreneur last month, another example in a long list of US policies hampering the world's efforts to combat the virus. On top of the blocked aid, the State Department is urging other countries not to accept help from Cuba's state-run international medical program.*

Jack Ma, the founder of the Chinese company Alibaba, included Cuba in a list of countries that his foundation was going to supply with coronavirus aid. Ma's foundation was going to send Cuba 100,000 facemasks, 10 COVID-19 test kits, and other aid, including ventilators and gloves. The Colombia-based Avianca Airlines refused to carry the aid to Cuba since the company's major shareholder is US-based and subject to the US trade embargo. [As of Sunday](#), Cuba has over 300 confirmed coronavirus cases.

The Trump administration has been especially hawkish towards Cuba and reversed most of President Obama's efforts to normalize relations with the island-nation. Most recently, the US [added sanctions](#) over Cuba's support for Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro. Cuba and Venezuela are part of what former National Security Advisor John Bolton dubbed the "Troika of Tyranny," Nicaragua being the third country. Bolton may be gone, but the Trump administration continues to ramp up economic warfare against the three left-wing governments.

In the first weeks of March, the Trump administration [added sanctions on Nicaragua](#), and the House [passed a bill](#) that will add even more if signed into law. On March 26<sup>th</sup>, the Justice Department unsealed an indictment on Maduro and other Venezuelan government officials, accusing them of "narco-terrorism." The indictment put a \$15 million bounty on Maduro, and the administration [later announced](#) it was deploying Navy ships off the coast of Venezuela - the largest US military buildup in Latin America since the 1989 invasion of Panama.

The presence of Cuban doctors in Venezuela is something Washington likes to point to as evidence of Cuba's efforts to keep Maduro in power. [Cuba's medical diplomacy](#) is a key aspect of the country's foreign policy, and there are currently around 37,000 Cuban medical workers deployed in 67 countries. Some of the medical professionals are part of free humanitarian aid missions, but most are part of missions paid for by the host government. Cuba brings in around \$6 billion a year from exporting its medical services, a vital revenue stream the Trump administration is working to impede.

The Trump administration has been persuading countries to not hire Cuban doctors on the grounds of bad labor practices. When governments friendlier to Washington come into power in Latin America, Cuban doctors are one of the first things to go. After the [US-backed](#) coup in Bolivia last year, Cuban doctors [were expelled](#), and some even arrested. Ecuador's government of Lenin Moreno also [cut ties](#) with Havana's medical program last year.

Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro terminated the country's medical program with Cuba when he won the election in 2018. Bolsonaro's decision was a huge blow to the program, and almost 9,000 doctors were expelled from Brazil. But in the face of a coronavirus, the [Brazilian government requested](#) for thousands of Cuban doctors to return. Dozens of other governments have asked for the help of Cuban doctors to help control the outbreak of coronavirus, including Italy, one of the countries hit hardest by the virus.

The pandemic has not stopped Washington from discouraging other countries from using Cuban medical professionals. "Cuba offers its international medical missions to those afflicted with #COVID-19 only to make up the money it lost when countries stopped participating in the abusive program. Host countries seeking Cuba's help for #COVID-19 should scrutinize agreements and end labor abuses," the State Department [said on Twitter](#) on March 24<sup>th</sup>, just a few days after doctors [started to arrive in Italy](#).

The allegation against Cuba is that the government only pays its doctors 25 percent of the money made on the overseas medical program, and they are forced to work long hours in unsafe conditions. But these accusations ring hollow while US policy blocks coronavirus aid and exacerbates outbreaks in countries like Iran. Regardless of questionable labor practices, right now, Cuba is sending the world doctors as the US is sending warships and [missiles](#).

Barack Obama's only decent foreign policy achievements were the steps to normalize relations with Cuba and the Iran nuclear deal. President Trump sabotaged these efforts and is now waging an economic war against both countries. History shows that the US embargo on Cuba will do nothing to change the country's government and will only hurt its people. As the world faces this pandemic, now is the time to lift the embargo and end all economic sanctions or history will remember the US as the country that weaponized the outbreak.

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