



Biden's Missteps in Cuba and Venezuela: One Year In

As the Biden administration closes out its first year in office, its incoherent and tepid policies towards Cuba and Venezuela undermine its ability to counter authoritarianism in the Western Hemisphere and beyond. While the administration has occasionally used strong rhetoric towards Cuban leadership, its application of duplicative sanctions against individuals and entities already sanctioned call into question President Biden's commitment to Cuban freedom. In Venezuela, the administration has refused to sanction a single Venezuelan official or entity despite flagrant sanctions violations and their continued criminality and corruption. Meanwhile, these authoritarian leaders are expanding their relationships with U.S. adversaries like Iran, China, and Russia, and intensifying their ability to wield influence throughout the Americas.

► Weak Response to Cuba's Historic Protests

Cuba's nationwide anti-regime protests were an opportunity for the U.S. to assert leadership and set measures in place to demonstrate U.S. support for a Cuba free from the communist dictatorship. Yet, following its massive July 2021 demonstrations and brutal regime crackdown, the Biden administration's policies continue to contradict its strong rhetoric. Issuing statements in support of Cuban freedom are meaningless when the administration is also pursuing policies that benefit the regime, like budget cuts to the Office of Cuba Broadcasting, and enacting duplicative sanctions against Cuban officials and entities. Meanwhile, Cuba continues exporting its authoritarianism throughout Latin America, expanding its presence in Venezuela, and strengthening its strategic alliances with malign actors. The inconsistent and weak leadership from the Biden administration gives Cuban leaders the impression America will tolerate the continuation of the Western Hemisphere's longest ruling communist military dictatorship – that sits just 90 miles from our shores.

► Relinquishing U.S. Leverage Against Venezuelan Dictatorship

The Maduro regime is illegitimate, corrupt, and repressive. Nicolas Maduro has repeatedly pretended to engage in dialogue with Venezuela's democratic forces as a tactic for obtaining sanctions relief without agreeing to meaningful policy changes. Yet, the Biden administration is emboldening the regime by supporting the latest round of sham negotiations in Mexico City with the interim Venezuelan government led by President Juan Guaido. Moreover, by refusing to rigorously implement existing or enact new sanctions, the U.S. has reduced the likelihood for a peaceful settlement to Venezuela's crisis.

Despite being under U.S. sanctions implemented by previous U.S. administration's, Venezuelan and Iranian state oil companies launched a new exportation deal in September 2021, building on previous agreements. No ships or individuals involved in these exchanges have been penalized by the Biden administration for their violations. Nor has a single Venezuelan official been sanctioned for their role in Venezuela's fraudulent November 2021 elections, or their continued efforts at subverting democracy or criminality. Instead, the administration eased energy sanctions, alleviating U.S. pressure on the Maduro regime. By refusing to properly enforce existing sanctions, the Biden administration is providing sanctions relief to the illegitimate Maduro regime and contributing to Venezuela's continued demise.



► Failure to Respond to Malign Chinese, Iranian, and Russian Activity

With America's adversaries rapidly gaining influence and access throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, the U.S. cannot afford to ignore the footholds they have established with the dictatorships in Cuba and Venezuela, as well as other countries in the region like Nicaragua. Despite the [Chinese Communist Party's \(CCP\) rising influence in the Western Hemisphere](#), the Biden administration has not developed a comprehensive policy to counter China's regional inroads and ambitions. Further, the CCP's exploitative campaign of vaccine diplomacy has bolstered its regional presence and increased Beijing's ability to forcibly impose its national interests.

Nicaragua severed ties with Taiwan in December 2021 shortly after the [Ortega-Murillo regime's reelection based on electoral fraud](#). America's unserious response to both events increases the likelihood of further CCP attempts at poaching Taiwan's remaining regional allies. Effectively countering the Maduro regime in Venezuela must also address the persistent challenge of Iranian activities, including weapons transfers and sales. In 2021, the Iranian Navy made its furthest known voyage into the Atlantic when it [attempted to deliver fast attack boats](#) and other advanced weapons systems. While this weapons shipment was deterred, Iran has already provided Venezuela with military equipment and technology, including unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV). Both Maduro and Ortega continue testing the Biden administration while enriching one another's illicit economies – as evidenced by a fall 2021 oil deal between their respective oil companies in direct violation of U.S. sanctions. Russia also benefits from the anti-U.S. sentiment and historic ties with Cuba and Nicaragua to serve as its gateway into the Western Hemisphere and augment its geopolitical influence. Venezuela remains Russia's largest regional client for arms sales and in 2021 Russian officials announced it will relaunch manufacturing Kalashnikov rifles in Venezuela.