

U.S. Puts Cuba Back On List Of State Sponsors of Terrorism



An empty street near the Capitol in Havana in May. The Trump administration plans to designate Cuba as a state sponsor of terrorism five years after it was removed from that U.S. list. Yamil Lage/AFP via Getty Images

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The Trump administration is designating Cuba as a state sponsor of terrorism in a move that will return the island nation to the pariah list from which it was removed five years ago.

As he announced the designation Monday, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo accused Cuba of “repeatedly providing support for acts of international terrorism in granting safe harbor to terrorists.”

Pompeo also said the Trump administration is intent on “denying the Castro

regime the resources it uses to oppress its people at home, and countering its malign interference in Venezuela and the rest of the Western Hemisphere.”

Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez tweeted, “We condemn the hypocritical and cynical designation of Cuba as a state sponsor of terrorism announced by the US. The political opportunism of this action is recognized by anyone with an honest regard for the scourge of terrorism and its victims.”

The U.S. removed Cuba from its state sponsors of terrorism list in May 2015. President Barack Obama’s administration had reached an agreement to restore relations with Cuba months earlier, including a plan to boost travel and trade between the two countries.

“The world is upside down,” Cuban diplomat José Ramón Cabañas said late last week as news spread of the pending change. He noted that the Cuban Embassy in Washington, D.C., came under an armed attack in April – an incident in which a Texas man was arrested on assault and weapons charges.

Sen. Patrick Leahy blasted the administration’s move, saying, “This blatantly politicized designation makes a mockery of what had been a credible, objective measure of a foreign government’s active support for terrorism.”

“Nothing remotely like that exists here,” the Democrat from Vermont said in a Monday statement, adding that the move will make U.S.-Cuba relations more difficult for the incoming Biden administration.

Being put on the U.S. terror list exposes countries to a suite of sanctions, including “restrictions on U.S. foreign assistance; a ban on defense exports and sales; certain controls over exports of dual-use items; and miscellaneous financial and other restrictions,” the U.S. State Department says.

The State Department currently lists only three countries as state sponsors of terrorism: Syria, Iran, and North Korea.

In a much-anticipated move, the U.S. formally took Sudan off the list last month as part of a deal in which the country agreed to normalize relations and open economic ties with Israel.

The Trump administration has steadily reversed many of the steps Obama took to end Cuba’s isolation. In the spring of 2019, it placed new sanctions and penalties

on Cuba, hoping to undermine the communist regime. It also killed a deal that would have made it easier for Cuban baseball players to join professional teams in the U.S. and Canada.

Two months later, the United States imposed new travel restrictions to stop U.S. citizens from visiting the island on cruise ships and other travel.

And in May it returned Cuba to a list of countries that the U.S. deems as “not cooperating fully” with its counterterrorism efforts. It cited the country’s refusal of a request from Colombia to extradite leaders of the National Liberation Army and said Cuba has harbored “several U.S. fugitives from justice.”

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