

Cuba's outsized international presence

The bankrupt Cuban regime funds, with foreign aid, a huge apparatus for internal control and global propaganda, influence, and expansion

December 10, 2023. For over six decades, Cuba's Communist dictatorship has devoted massive resources to advancing its political, economic, and geostrategic interests internationally and expanding its authoritarian brand in alliance with rouge states and criminal cartels. Despite its warped priorities, egregious human rights violations, pervasive debt defaults, and threats to global peace and security, the Cuban regime enjoys impunity, inordinate international influence, and aid from many governments, organizations, and groups. No matter its insistence on a parasitic command economy and failed ideology, unconditioned humanitarian assistance pours in from even the strongest democracies or smallest island-nations, as well as from many multilateral agencies, international organizations, and solidarity groups from all over the world.

As the vast majority of Cuba's citizens —not the elite— endure poverty and deprivation, vast state apparatuses maintain police-state internal control, spread propaganda, and exert international influence.

Diplomatic footprint

Cuban maintains an inordinate number of embassies, consulates, and representations in multilateral bodies. The expensive network includes 126 embassies, 20 consulates and a permanent mission to the UN in New York City with 43 diplomats.

The table on the following page illustrates the disproportionality of Cuba's official international presence compared to selected countries in relation to size and economic standing. Cuba has more embassies and more diplomats at the United Nations in New York City than many vastly larger and richer countries including Spain, Italy, Canada, Colombia, Mexico, Thailand, Philippines, Poland, and Peru. Cuba has embassies even in many of the smallest and poorest island-nations of the Caribbean and Pacific, including St. Kitts & Nevis (pop. 53,192), Antigua & Barbuda (pop. 99,477), Seychelles (pop. 99,426), and Kiribati (pop. 119,446).

Countries with a similar population, such as Dominican Republic, Honduras, and Bolivia in Latin America, have three to four times less embassies and around six times less diplomats at the UN New York. In Europe, Belgium, Czech Republic, and Greece have 40 to 43 less embassies and 30% to 49% less presence at the UN New York, while their GDP is at least 7.8, 3.7 and 2.8 times that of Cuba's respectively and their respective exports are 48, 20, and 6.9 times those of Cuba.

Cuba persistently courts countries for their votes in the international system, where all votes are generally weighted equally. On November 15th, 2023, Cuba was [elected](#) to the Executive Board of UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) for 2023-2027, when 31 of 58 member states [were filled](#). Cuba obtained 158 votes, more than Italy (155), Spain (154), France (153), United Kingdom (150), Germany (143) and the United States (138). On October 10th, 2023 76% of the General Assembly's possible votes, (146 of 192), to sit at the [Human Rights Council](#) for a second 3-year term. The totalitarian dictatorship is again responsible for "the promotion and protection of all human rights around the globe." In 2022, Cuba had been elected to three subsidiary bodies of the UN Economic and Social Council, in 2021 for the International Labor Organization's Governing Body (2021-2024), and in 2020 for the Executive Boards of the Pan-American Health Organization (2020-2023), UN Children's Fund, UNICEF (2020-2022), and World Food Program (2020-2022).

Cuba's diplomatic presence - comparative table

June 2022

Country	Pop. millions	GDP billions 2020	Exports millions 2020	No. of embassies	UN NYC
Cuba	11.3M	\$67.8B*	\$8,769	126	43
SELECTED COUNTRIES IN LATIN AMERICA					
Uruguay	3.5M	\$53.6B	\$13,607	49	8
Panama	4.4M	\$53.9B	\$21,379	56	8
Nicaragua	6.6M	\$12.6B	\$5,342	32	6
Paraguay	7.1M	\$35.7B	\$11,933	38	11
Honduras	10.M	23.6B	\$8,336	32	7
Dom. Rep.	11.1M	\$98.8B	\$14,425	48	22
Haiti	11.4M	\$14.5B	\$1,110	26	14
Bolivia	12.0M	\$36.6B	\$7,448	33	8
Ecuador	18.1M	\$104.3B	\$22,264	43	12
Chile	19.3M	\$253.9B	\$79,789	73	12
Venezuela	28.4M	\$482.4B	\$80,524	122	7
Peru	30.7M	\$202B	\$45,119	63	15
Argentina	43.4M	\$389.3B	\$64,589	83	12
Colombia	46.7M	\$271.4B	\$36,702	63	26
Mexico	121.7M	\$1,150B	\$431,432	80	30
Brazil	204.3M	\$1,444.7B	\$243,739	133	45
OTHER SELECTED COUNTRIES					
Austria	9.0M	\$433.3B	\$222,847	85	50
Sweden	10.1M	\$541.2B	\$249,149	94	26
Portugal	10.2M	\$228.5B	\$84,633	76	32
Azerbaijan	10.2M	\$42.6B	\$15,208	67	27
Greece	10.4M	\$188.8B	\$60,397	83	15
Czech Rep.	10.7M	\$245.3B	\$174,171	89	12
Belgium	11.6M	\$521.8B	\$417,561	84	21
Tunisia	11.8M	\$41.6B	\$19,455	59	14
Burundi	11.9M	\$2.8B	\$141	26	12
Canada	37.7M	\$1645.4B	\$483,153	106	22
Poland	37.8M	596.6B	\$335,209	91	5
Spain	46.7M	\$1,281.5B	\$392,402	122	25
Italy	60.5M	\$1888.7B	\$555,043	124	13
France	65.2M	\$2,630B	\$733,165	160	43
Thailand	69.8M	\$501.6B	\$258,155	66	24
Philippines	109.6M	\$361.5B	\$91,052	64	12
Japan	126.5M	\$5057.8B	\$785,365	151	14

Notes

*The World Bank reported \$107 b for Cuba's GDP. A more realistic approach for GDP in 2014 by economist Pavel Vidal was used. Many economists believe actual GDP is lower.

Sources

Embassies: <https://www.embassypages.com/>
 Pop.: <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/population-by-country/>
 GDP: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD>
 Exports: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NE.EXP.GNFS.CD>
 UN Blue Book: <https://bluebook.unmeetings.org/>

Cuba's embassies advance geopolitical and economic goals, organize selective Potemkin tours, and, according to diplomats, throw “[great parties](#)” with lots of food and mojitos. Most, if not all, the embassies host intelligence centers dedicated to recruiting agents and managing a gigantic global army of spies, collaborators, and propagandists: journalists, government officials, artists, scientists, intellectuals, academics, diplomats, etc. According to defectors, the Directorate of Intelligence's prime objective is to advance Cuba's interests especially by countering the U.S. Cuba is estimated to have at least 5,000 intelligence relations in the [U.S.](#) and over 1,600 in [Latin America & the Caribbean](#).



Solidarity group protesting the Oslo Freedom Forum, Norway, May 28, 2019. Courtesy: M. Werlau

Solidarity network

Over time, the Cuban regime has built a vast international [solidarity network](#) of 1,649 friendship associations in 150 countries, 73 alumni associations in 62 countries, and relationships with 60 peace organizations in 57 countries. In the U.S. alone, at least 72 organizations [are part](#) of the National Network on Cuba, NNOC, including the [International U.S.-Cuba Normalization Committee Coalition](#). Even the tiny island of Dominica (population 72,344), has a Dominica-Cuba Friendship Association.

In [2023](#), Cuba's official media reported that 109 “Parliamentary Friendship Groups” had been created to influence foreign policy in favor of the Cuban Revolution within parliaments worldwide: 34 in Europe, 21 in the Americas and Caribbean 21, 28 in Africa and the Middle East, and 26 in Asia. This huge worldwide army of influencers demands the end of the U.S. “blockade,” promotes a positive image of Cuba and Venezuela, raises donations for Cuba, and helps spread pro-regime propaganda.

Health diplomacy

A favorite agenda for synchronized action is promoting Cuba's “medical internationalism” as humanitarianism and solidarity when, in fact, it is a clever scheme of trafficking in persons. (See Cuba Archive's [overview](#) on this practice). The Cuban regime exploits the captive slave labor force, most notably in “medical brigades,” in partnership with many governments and international organizations. In 2022, Cuba reported \$4.9 billion in revenues from the export of “health and social services,” or 69% of total export services. In May 2023, Cuba [reported](#) 25,688 health workers in 59 countries and to having sent more than 605,698 exported workers to 165 countries since 1963.

Propaganda and disinformation

Fidel Castro considered propaganda “[the main food of the revolution](#)” and, from the beginning of the revolutionary regime, prioritized building a synchronized propaganda apparatus. [Prensa Latina](#) (PL) news agency is one of the many branches of the State’s propaganda behemoth; the large consortium has over 400 offices internationally operating in six languages in multiple print, television, radio, and digital sites with an in-house full-time staff of around 500 and around 900 to 1,000 freelancers and collaborators all over the world. It has a publishing house producing numerous publications, a book publishing house, an entity producing audiovisual materials, and a TV station, and radio station broadcasting dozens of daily programs around the world. Nothing similar exist in any country of Cuba’s size.



84 buses donated by Japan arrive in Cuba, Jan 2022. Photo: [Tribuna de La Habana](#)



U.S. organizations arrive with donations, 2023. Photo: [Diario las Americas](#), from Cuban State media.



The government of France donates powdered milk, Mar. 2023.



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