

LATIN AMERICA

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TENSIONS GROW BETWEEN CUBA AND THE US

CUBA COULD BE RENAMED A "STATE SPONSOR OF TERRORISM"

Despite already strained relations between the US and Cuba, a United States official has anonymously announced the country's intention to return Cuba to its list of "state sponsors of terrorism". Countries are designated as such for "repeatedly provid[ing] support for acts of international terrorism". Inclusion on this list entails harsh unilateral sanctions, including economic sanctions and travel restrictions. Countries currently on the list are Iran, North Korea, Sudan and Syria.

According to the anonymous source, the United States is considering re-adding Cuba to this list, in part because of its support for Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, but also because the country has given refuge to Colombian rebel leaders from the National Liberation Army (ELN). The US also accuses Cuba of harbouring US fugitives.

Cuba was included on the list from 1982 until 2015, when President Obama removed it and restored diplomatic relations. The re-designation is said to have little practical impact, because while Cuba is not currently on the list, the US already maintains many restrictions, including the decades-old economic embargo. Re-adding Cuba to the list would prove to be mostly symbolic, but could re-escalate Cold War-era tensions.

Header: Havana [cropped] - Gideon (flickr.com)

BRAZILIAN HEALTH MINISTER RESIGNS AMID PANDEMIC

Just weeks after Brazil's Health Minister Luiz Henrique Mandetta was fired, his replacement Nelson Teich has resigned. Mandetta was fired by right-wing President Jair Bolsonaro after disagreements on the country's response to the SARS-CoV2 pandemic. Mandetta urged people to stay home and advocated for social distancing measures, while Bolsonaro downplayed the virus as "a little flu".

Bolsonaro opposes lockdown measures and maintains the position that the economy must remain open. The president has stated that the spread of the virus is inevitable, which is a less than acceptable response that threatens the lives of millions.

While Teich gave no reason for his resignation at a press conference, evidence points to his disagreement with Bolsonaro on the use of chloroquine, a drug that has gained international attention as a possible treatment, but that has not been proven to work by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

Now that Brazil has lost two Health Ministers in a month, the future is uncertain. With millions of lives at risk, there seems to be a growing political divide in place of an effective public health response. With nearly 223,000 cases and over 15,000 deaths, a more serious response is needed to reduce the spread.