



By: TA | AP Brief

CIA Director John Ratcliffe met with Cuban officials in Havana



CIA Director John Ratcliffe met with Cuban officials including Raúl Castro's grandson during a high-level visit to the island Thursday, Cuban and U.S. officials said.

Ratcliffe met with Raúl Guillermo Rodríguez Castro, Interior Minister Lázaro Álvarez Casas and the head of Cuban intelligence services, and discussed intelligence cooperation, economic stability and security issues. A CIA official confirmed the meetings to the AP.

Ratcliffe was there "to personally deliver President Donald Trump's message that the United States is prepared to seriously engage on economic and security issues, but only if Cuba makes fundamental changes," the CIA official said.

An official statement from Cuba's government noted that Thursday's meeting "took place ... against a backdrop of complex bilateral relations."

While the U.S. stressed that Cuba cannot continue to be a "safe haven for adversaries in the Western Hemisphere," the Cuban delegation insisted that the island presents no threat to U.S. security.

Cuban officials also took issue with the nation's continued inclusion on the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism.

Rodríguez Castro previously secretly met with U.S. Secretary of State **Marco Rubio** on the sidelines of a Caribbean Community summit in St. Kitts in February.

While he's never occupied a government post, he served as his grandfather's bodyguard and later as head of Cuba's equivalent of the Secret Service.

The U.S. blockade

U.S. and **Cuban officials** also met earlier this year in Cuba. The ongoing meetings between U.S. and Cuban officials mark the first U.S. government flights to land in Cuba other than at the U.S. Naval Base at Guantanamo Bay

since 2016.

Thursday's meeting comes weeks after the Cuban government confirmed that it had recently met with U.S. officials on the island as tensions between the two sides remain high over the U.S. energy blockade of the Caribbean country and as **Cuba's power grid** has collapsed and energy to its eastern provinces has been cut.

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The U.S. blockade of fuel to the island has heightened its economic woes, with reduced work hours and food spoilage as refrigerators stop working.

Earlier this week, the U.S. State Department reiterated that the U.S. will provide Cuba with \$100 million in humanitarian assistance and support for satellite internet "if the Cuban regime will permit it."

In late January, Trump **threatened tariffs** on any country that sells or supplies oil to Cuba.

Though Trump also has threatened to intervene in the country, and Cuban President **Miguel Díaz-Canel** said recently that his country was prepared to fight if that should happen, sources told the AP earlier this month that military action is not imminent.