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Russian Fuel Tanker Fails to Reach Cuba, Changes Course After Weeks at Sea

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MarineTraffic

Russia's attempt to send fuel to crisis-hit Cuba has hit a setback after a sanctioned tanker carrying diesel failed to reach the island and spent weeks drifting in the Atlantic, according to maritime tracking data reviewed by exiled investigative outlet The Insider.

The tanker Universal, carrying around 270,000 barrels of diesel fuel, departed Russia in April bound for Cuba but spent the past month drifting in the Sargasso Sea, roughly 1,600 kilometers (1,000 miles) northeast of the Caribbean island, before changing course south toward Brazil, The Insider reported, citing data from vessel-tracking service Starboard Maritime Intelligence.

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The vessel's destination is currently listed as "For order" — a maritime designation

indicating it is awaiting further routing instructions or a final destination.

The Insider said this suggested U.S. authorities had not permitted the tanker to proceed to Cuba.

The Universal departed from the Russian Baltic port of Vistino in the Leningrad region on April 6 and, according to Britain's The Telegraph, was escorted through the English Channel by a Russian military convoy.

The newspaper reported that the Russian Black Sea Fleet frigate Admiral Grigorovich later accompanied the vessel into the Atlantic.

The tanker is under U.S., European Union, British, Swiss and Canadian sanctions.

According to The Insider, only one tanker has successfully delivered oil to Cuba this year: the Anatoly Kolodkin, which transported around 730,000 barrels after receiving U.S. authorization.

Those supplies had reportedly been exhausted by late April.

Cuba has faced widespread fuel shortages and recurring blackouts in recent months as the U.S. has ramped up pressure on the country, including through a blockade on fuel imports.

The United States has said it seeks political and economic change in Cuba and has urged reforms by the island's communist leadership.

On May 20, U.S. President Donald Trump's administration indicted former Cuban leader Raúl Castro on charges stemming from the 1996 shootdown of aircraft operated by the humanitarian group Brothers to the Rescue, which killed four people, including three Americans.

Following the accusations, the U.S. sent the aircraft carrier USS Nimitz and its strike group toward Cuban waters.

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