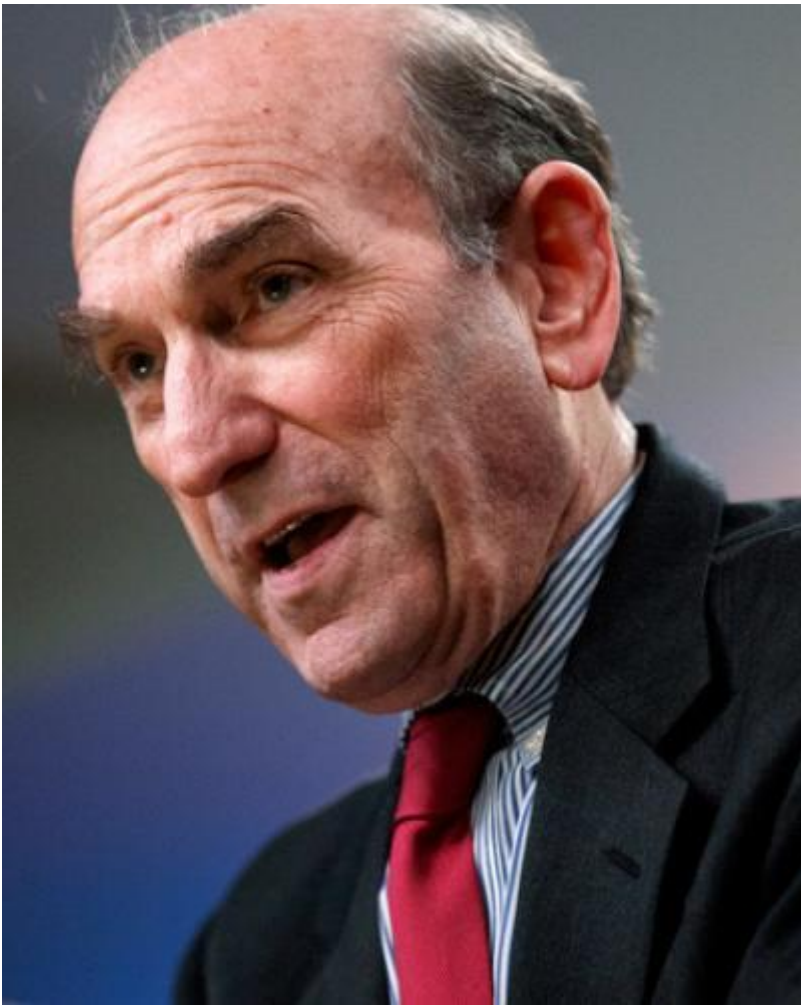


U.S. is assessing further sanctions on Cuba over the island's support to Venezuela



Washington, October 10 (RHC)--The Trump administration is considering new sanctions on Cuba over its support for Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and is taking a "closer look" at Russia's role in helping him remain in power, the U.S. special envoy on Venezuela, Elliott Abrams, told Reuters.

"We're always looking for ways to squeeze Cuba because we do not see any improvement in their conduct either with respect to Venezuela or human rights internally," Abrams said in an interview from his State Department office.

The administration official added that the new sanctions under consideration for the island, expected "in the weeks ahead," would likely target the tourism sector as well as Venezuela's oil delivered to Havana, building on the U.S. blacklisting of tankers used to transport the supplies.

President Donald Trump's frustration over the failure of his "maximum

pressure" campaign to unseat Maduro has spurred foreign policy aides to ready further U.S. actions and press for tougher sanctions on OPEC member Venezuela by European and Latin American partners, a second senior administration official told Reuters on condition of anonymity.

While U.S. sanctions on Cuba stem from accusations that it provides training, arms, and intelligence to Maduro's security forces, targeting Russia would be based heavily on Moscow's financial support of Caracas.

Asked whether Washington is preparing sanctions against Rosneft, Abrams said the administration was “taking a closer look at the ways in which Russia is sustaining the regime” but declined to specify any entities or individuals.

In early August, the Trump administration froze U.S. assets of the Venezuelan government and threatened “secondary sanctions” on any company doing business with it, an escalation of pressure on Maduro. The move was widely seen as opening the door to putting sanctions on Rosneft, which in recent months has taken around half of Venezuela’s crude exports.

Abrams said the administration now intended to start “naming names” under Trump’s August order and that new individual sanctions are expected over the next three months.

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