

Total ban on US private flights to Cuba

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Effective today, June 5th, no US private aircraft will be allowed to travel to Cuba. The rule comes from the BIS – the US Bureau of Industry and Security, part of a further clampdown on Cuba policy by the US government.

We spent the day here in OPSGROUP clarifying the new rules and what it means for US operators.

What happened? BIS issued a new rule today, **June 5** called “Restricting the Temporary Sojourn of Aircraft and Vessels to Cuba”. [official copy here] [Guidance here].

This is tough to read and understand. Nothing new about that. So, we asked OPSGROUP, discussed it with a whole bunch of members, got some legal interpretation, and got some great help from the NBAA.

Here’s the plain English wrap up:

- **US Part 91 private flights:** Effective June 5, you cannot operate an N-reg aircraft privately to Cuba for any reason. This includes Corporate. It doesn’t matter if your passengers meet the “category requirements (see later)”, it’s a no go.
- **Part 135 Air Ambulance:** You can go, and you don’t need a license. From the rules: “Air ambulances operating under 14 CFR part 135, may depart from the United States under its own power for any destination”. “Air ambulances will remain eligible for the license exception when destined to Cuba”.
- **Part 135 Charter:** This was unclear because of the wording of the new rules. **But you can go.** We asked BIS specifically about this, and the wording of the new paragraph is meant to be read as a series of options that allow you to go to Cuba – 135 is covered under the “AOC holder” bit.
- **Part 129:** You can go. Part 129 is foreign operators. An example would be Air Canada doing a charter from JFK-HAV. That’s allowed.

- **Part 121:** No changes. Airlines can operate.

BIS vs OFAC

The first gatekeeper of Cuba rules is BIS. If they don't prohibit your operation, eg. Part 91 – then you proceed to the second gatekeeper – OFAC, and look into whether you need a license, and what category your passengers are travelling under.

Categories of allowed travel

There were 12 categories – or “reasons” to be allowed to go to Cuba. There are now 11. The one removed was known as “People to people”. These are set by OFAC.

What does Cuba say?

Thanks to one of our members who called the **Cuba CAA** this morning, and got this:

“In our country there is no regulation in this regard. They can fly over and land registrations of any nationality without any distinction provided they meet the requirements requested and that you know all right.”

As we would expect, none of the restrictions come from the Cuba side. So everyone continues to be welcome in Havana, it's just the US government that is restricting matters for US operators.

A super simple FAQ

Can I fly my private C172 to Cuba?

No.

Can I fly my owner to Cuba in a G550, if he passes the ‘category test’?

No. He can go, but has to go on a commercial service.

Can I operate a Corporate Jet to Havana, for business reasons?

No. Regardless of the reason the principles might want to go to Cuba, you cannot operate any aircraft under Part 91.

But I see in the rules that you can apply for an exemption from BIS?

Yeah, you can, but they will say no. “License applications for the temporary sojourn to Cuba of those vessels and aircraft are subject to a general policy of denial.”

Can I operate a charter flight to Cuba?

Yes. BIS rules don't prohibit this. But you then need to look into the OFAC rules.

Can I go to Mexico first, and then to Cuba?

No. In their lengthy FAQ, “A license from the Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) is required to fly private or corporate aircraft to Cuba, even if the aircraft stops in another country first.”. And y'all ain't gettin' no license.

I am a Canadian operator. Can I operate to Cuba?

Yep. This is all about US operators being restricted. You can fly direct to Havana like you always did, and under the Part 129 bit in the new rule, you can also operate from the US to Cuba.

So, we think we have this all correct as the final version. If we don't hear any objections, we'll add this to the OPSGROUP databank, and make a blog post. From here, we will post this in the new Forum, and the discussion can continue there!

THANKS EVERYONE!

Great team effort today to get this into an understandable-by-humans format. Well done!