

Preventing the Sale of Venezuelan Oil to Cuba: Killing Two Birds with a Stone

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Recent US sanctions have been directed at the heart of Venezuela's economy: the oil industry, an industry that has also been crippled by the continued sabotages on the electric power grid of the country.

But when you think that enough suffering has been imposed on the people of Venezuela with all sorts of warfare actions taken out from the toolbox of a full scale Hybrid War, the US government strikes again with another hit. This time by preventing the sale of Venezuelan oil to Cuba, which amounts to killing the two proverbial birds with one stone.

That is precisely the intention of the latest US sanctions against Venezuela targeting 34 oil tankers dedicated to transporting crude from Venezuela to Cuba. The measures against the Venezuelan cargo vessels owned by state-run oil company PDVSA are doubly illegal since they are also extraterritorial affecting two other firms: the Liberia-based Ballito Shipping Incorporated and the Greece-based ProPer In Management Incorporated.

Venezuela has been the main supplier of crude to the island based on a joint economic agreement that guarantees preferential prices of oil to Cuba in exchange for medical and educational services to Venezuela.

Cuba has been subjected to almost 60 years of relentless cruel economic and financial blockade by the US. At the beginning of this year, not coincidentally, the State Department issued a statement saying it would suspend Title III of the 1996 Helms-Burton Act for 45 days only (starting on February 1) in order to conduct "a careful review". After a further extension of 30 more days, John Bolton is expected to announce Trump's full application of Title III with no exceptions, and no more waivers.

So far successive US presidents suspended the lawsuit provisions for up to six months. This has been done since the beginning and Clinton, Bush, Obama and Trump himself have signed this provision every six months as allowed by the law.

Title III is the most insidious piece of the Helms-Burton Act, which allows US citizens who had properties nationalized by the revolutionary State of Cuba - including Cuban-Americans who were not US citizens at the time of nationalization - to file a suit in the United States against persons that may be "trafficking" in those properties.

The threat of US lawsuits that have a definite extraterritorial clout is an obvious deterrent for international companies from doing business in Cuba.

The Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bruno Rodriguez, has categorically rejected the US action highlighting the fact that the activation of Title III is a blatant act of extraterritoriality

against other countries that may suddenly be sued by US courts.

Cuba's Granma newspaper wrote, Cubans

“would be forced to return, reimburse or pay U.S. claimants for the house in which they live, the area on which their communities are built, the arable land where they cultivate produce, the school where their children are educated, the hospital or polyclinic where they receive medical assistance.”

Russia has condemned it for violating international law. All Cuban nationalizations were and are legal under international law.

The US will likely apply Title III selectively trying to hit those governments that are not friendly, and spare Canada and European countries, for instance. Implementation will be centered on antagonist countries like Russia, China, and Venezuela.

Cuba is being targeted for its socialism aside for being a friend of Venezuela. The US timing is interesting because Cuba has just had a referendum where almost 87% of Cuban voters voted “YES” on a new constitution, which represents a very strong majority.

During the popular debates from mid-August to mid-November of 2018, it was the people who decided to be closer to socialism and even to include the ideal of communism in the new constitution, which had been deleted in the draft.

However, we have to understand that this renewed attack on Cuba is really aimed at Venezuela.

The call to apply sanctions on the Venezuelan crude to Cuba came from Juan Guaidó, the unconstitutionally self-appointed president, saying that the revenues from the sale of oil is financing Cuban intelligence operations in Venezuela.

Of course he is only repeating the lines supplied by US Treasury Secretary, Steven Mnuchin, who said that Cuba and Venezuela are running an “*oil-for-repression scheme*”.

This comes from the same US government that has appointed Elliott Abrams as US special envoy to Venezuela. Abrams was convicted for his involvement in the Iran-Contras scandal in the 1980s during the Reagan administration. The scandal involved the illegal arms sale to Iran to finance the Contras rebel group to overthrow the Sandinista government in Nicaragua.

Elliott Abrams is now in charge of overthrowing the Bolivarian government in Venezuela. He has already made a failed attempt trying to force “humanitarian aid” into Venezuela from Colombia last February. I am sure that as we write he is devising means to introduce arms into Venezuela.

Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza stated that Venezuela would continue ensuring that Cuba receives the oil that it needs.

“We will always fulfill Venezuelan promises and, of course, the commitments to brothers and sisters like Cuban and Venezuelan people”, he said. He added, “We are experts at guerrilla operations... Even when the conventional power of

capitalism attacks you, you have to know how to respond by unconventional avenues, always respecting international law. We are experts.”

The attacks to force a regime change in Venezuela are numerous and illegal amounting to a hybrid war involving

- economic boycotts
- financial sanctions
- illegal confiscation of billions of dollars deposited in international banks
- cyber attacks
- sabotage on the electric power grid carried out by mercenaries and terrorist groups.

This is a reminder of what we have seen in Cuba.

To be sure, the US is behind all of this but the Canadian government is not only complicit, it is an active participant with its own sanctions, as recently as a few days ago on 43 Venezuelan officials including Jorge Arreaza, and by inciting some Latin American countries to betray Venezuela.

Venezuela is resisting and continues its Bolivarian process to build a socialist society based on self-government with participation of all Venezuelans as protagonists.

On the face of such blatant abuses that may be considered as crimes against humanity, we ask:

Does the Trump administration know that the revenues from the sale of Venezuelan oil are used to provide food and medicines, and other life supporting services to Venezuelans? I am not going out on a limb when I say they do, but they don't care.

Does the Trump administration know that Cuba needs Venezuelan oil to run its industries and support the infrastructure that provide food and medicines, and other life supporting services to Cubans? Of course they know. The US has sabotaged Cuba with one of the longest and most cruel economic and financial blockades for almost 60 years.

We must conclude that the US government is not just innocently killing two birds with a stone. The US government is criminally harming millions of people in two countries in the cruelest way cutting off their livelihood with unilateral coercing measures.

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