

US Imposes Illegal and Deadly Sanctions on Venezuela in David vs. Goliath Battle

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Global Research, May 03, 2019

Region: [Latin America & Caribbean, USA](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#), [Media Disinformation](#)

"We are complicit in crimes against humanity when we know about them and when we don't stop them." — Jacob Appelbaum

The unilaterally issued economic sanctions that the US leveled against Venezuela in 2017 and this year violate international laws the charters of the UN and the Organization of American States, according to a recently published report.

The 25-page report authored by Mark Weisbrot and Jeffrey Sachs cites articles in the Charter of the Organization of American States (OAS) that prohibit sanctions. Specifically, Article 19 states in part,

"No State or group or group of states has the right to intervene...for any reason whatsoever in the internal or exterior affairs of another state."

Article 20 declares,

"No State may use... coercive measures of an economic or political character... to force the sovereign will of another State and obtain from it advantages of any kind."

The authors conclude that the Trump administration's sanctions against Venezuela "clearly violate both of these articles of the OAS Charter." Additionally, the report notes that legal scholars denounce the sanctions as violations of international law, specifically, the UN Charter and international human rights law (Weisbrot and Sachs 2019).

The August 2017 sanctions that the Trump regime initiated atop a debilitating recession had devastating effects on Venezuela's most vulnerable: children, elderly, chronically sick and poverty ridden as Venezuelan oil production plummeted 42 percent during 2017 and 2018 amid harsh international banking restrictions created on orders from the US. This directly impacted the imports of food, medicines and equipment that supports the electricity grid, water systems and public transportation. The US Treasury Department in action tantamount to throwing gasoline on a raging fire issued a warning to international financing sources that collapsed Venezuelan banking institutions and evaporated credit sources. These demonstrably illegal actions by the US directly hinder the availability of life-saving goods for civilian Venezuelans (Weisbrot and Sachs 2019).

Beginning on January 28, 2019 Trump issued a barrage of executive orders. Not the least of

these was the Trump administration and its cabal of lapdog-courtier nations bringing forth Juan Guaidó, a political unknown in Venezuela where only about 19 percent of the population had ever heard of the 35-year-old, self-proclaimed “Interim President.” Guaidó’s so-called parallel government along with other “sanctions resulting from further statements, threats or actions from the executive branch of the United States” must be included in the US outrages to crush the ability of a sovereign government to purchase essential imports (Weisbrot and Sachs 2019).

The ramification of the US sanctions is the “collective punishment” of the most vulnerable of Venezuela’s population. An estimated 40,000 deaths have occurred subsequent the sanctions during 2017 and 2018, according to the National Survey on Living Conditions that was administered by three Venezuelan universities. More than 300,000 were at risk during this period because of the unavailability of needed life-saving medicines that treat chronic disease. The increased sanctions during 2019 will increase the risk of what amounts to death sentences for the chronically sick in Venezuela (Weisbrot and Sachs 2019).

Displaying in full the sadistic, mercenary and criminal nature of the Trump administration, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on March 11 gloated during an exchange with Associated Press reporter Mike Lee, “The circle is tightening; the humanitarian crisis is increasing.... You can see the increasing pain and suffering that the Venezuelan people are suffering from.” In January Trump’s national security adviser John Bolton blurted,

“We’re in conversation with major American companies now.... It will make a big difference to the United States economically if we could have American oil companies really invest in and produce the oil capabilities in Venezuela” (Weisbrot and Sachs 2019).

Under the lie of humanitarian assistance, the US began its crippling sanctions that are designed to disrupt and collapse the Venezuelan economy specifically and its society in general. The Trump administration unilaterally issued by executive order broad economic sanctions on the South American nation. But Venezuela had been in the US crosshairs since Bill Clinton’s administration when President Hugo Chávez elected president in December 1998. Chávez, who was Nicolás Maduro’s predecessor and mentor, served as Venezuela’s president between February 2, 1999 and his death from cancer on March 5, 2013 (Weisbrot and Sachs 2019).

The US policymakers’ hatred of Hugo Chávez and his successor Nicolás Maduro stem from the policies of these two Venezuelan leaders that turned the tide of poverty and failed social programs during the “Lost Years” of the 1980s under regimes supported by the US. By 1998 most Venezuelans, disillusioned with the volatile neoliberal agenda of right-wing President Carlos Andrés Pérez, sought radical change in their government. Chávez was elected Venezuela’s president with 56 percent of the popular vote that consisted largely of dark-skinned, urban poor. Chávez continued to enjoy popularity in the face of a failed US-backed coup d’état, an economy-destroying oil strike, a recall election and a withering propaganda campaign of the white oligarchy-controlled media that historian Greg Grandin quipped “made Fox News look like PBS.” Mismanagement of the decades-long US-backed regimes opened the door for *Chavismo*, that combines elements of socialism, left-wing populism, feminism and Bolivarian nationalism. By 2004, Chávez controlled Venezuela’s oil as he delivered an ambitious program to improve social conditions for the poor. Chávez

embarked on an audacious program to weaken US hegemony in Latin America with “poly-polar equilibrium.” During his period as president, Chávez survived 15 national votes that former US President Jimmy Carter called the “best in the world” (Beezy 2008; Grandin 2013).

Of course, Chávez’s brash and audacious humor rankled US neoconservatives to further hone their blades when in September 2006, he stood at the floor of the UN General Assembly in New York City and informed the diplomats assembled there that President George W. Bush was Beelzebub.

“Yesterday, the devil came here,” he said. “Right here... And it smells of sulfur still today, this table that I am now standing in front of.”

Then he made the sign of the cross, kissed his hand and winked at the audience (Grandin 2013).

Since the George W. Bush cadre of neoconservatives adopted the Project for a New American Century (PNAC) recipe for US global hegemony through manufactured public consent for the Iraq invasion in 2003, the government and its stooges in the corporate media recite the same rhetoric and protocol. In every instance when the empire decides to bring “democracy” at the barrel of a gun to exploit weaker nations’ natural resources it follows the same scheme: (1) It declares the democratically elected leader is a dictator who is starving his people, while it issues illegal threats of regime change; (2) the US empire manipulates the world price of various commodities and access to international lending institutions to weaken the subject country’s economy; (3) the empire issues bribes, blackmails or threatens leaders of other nations to invoke a trade embargo that further collapses the economy; (4) the US and its allies seize assets of the targeted nation; (5) the CIA forms paramilitary forces to disrupt the targeted nation internally by creating false-flag operations and sabotage; (6) the CIA attempts to initiate a coup d’état within the targeted country’s military in the hope that the hardship created by propaganda and sanctions will cause a popular uprising. Venezuela is a textbook example of these illegal and immoral processes are presently in motion in that beleaguered nation.

Since the dawn of the new millennium, the US has been involved in at least nine wars: Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Somalia, the Indian Ocean, Libya, Uganda, Syria and Yemen. Currently, the Trump administration, through Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and national security adviser John Bolton, is making overt threats of the use of force to topple the Nicolás Maduro government in Venezuela, a violation of the US Constitution, UN charter and international laws. Special envoy to Venezuela, Elliott Abrams, who backed death squads in Central America during the Reagan administration, is now Trump’s point man in the US efforts to topple the Maduro government.

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