

US Summit: Democracy and Sanctions

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*The US works at imposing to the world a self-serving definition of democracy, and plans to use it on its Summit against whoever refuse US hegemony and domination. A self-appointed leader on these matters, the US seems blind to its own failure to live up to its Summit objectives. Renewing democracy in the US and around the world seems an elusive attempt to clean the US image, just months after its withdrawal from Afghanistan when **President Joe Biden** ordered a parting drone to strike and wipe out an entire family of ten, including seven children.*

A country for the rich and privileged, the US renewal would require profound and intense political transformations. Private health, private education and a privatized prison system add to a culture of gun violence violating human rights at home. An expensive private health care system leaves many without access, while those who have access, fearing additional costs and deductibles, often fail to use preventive health care. Public education was left to decay while private education indebted people in more than 1.7 trillion dollars limiting the development of younger generations. Many federal prisons are private while the entire prison system, privatized for profit, shows a 76 percent recidivism and exploits prisoners and their families -mostly poor and people of color. (1)

A dominant culture of gun violence proves deadly. According to the Centers for Disease Control 45,000 people have been killed by gun violence in the US in 2020 -more than 120 gun-related deaths per day and 30 percent higher than in 2019. Between 2015 and 2019 there were 2, 606 gun-death by law enforcement alone. Gun related homicide rates are 25 times greater than in any other wealthy nation, and yet, the biggest percentage of gun-related fatalities comes from suicide (nearly two-thirds of them).

Accidental injuries and deaths are frequent too: researchers from the University of Pennsylvania and Columbia University found an annual average of 85,700 emergency hospital visits for non-fatal gun injuries between 2009 and 2017. ABC News developed a **Gun Violence Tracker** for the week of November 19-25, 2021 there were 345 deaths and 623 injuries in the US due to firearms. (2)

The cost of gun violence is astronomical, close to one billion dollars annually on immediate healthcare costs alone — actual costs are far greater and include long-term physical and mental health care, criminal justice and other. Perceptions, often misleading, focus the conversation on gun control on mass shootings. Still, they represent less than three percent of annual gun-related deaths and their primary reason in the US is **domestic violence**. In big cities like Chicago gun deaths are emphasized, while half of homicides by gun occur in suburban and rural areas. Gun injuries are widespread and not exclusive to big cities. While black males are disproportionately victims of intentional shootings white males in rural communities are overrepresented in suicide by gun. (2)

Renewing democracy in the US is a challenge; and, renewing democracy around the world cannot be left in the hands of the US and its leaders. The president of Iran, **Ebrahim Raisi**, explained in September at the UN General Assembly that *“sanctions are the US’ new way of war with the nations of the world.”* During times of covid 19 such punishment, he argued, amounts to *“crimes against humanity.”* Touching on the events of January 6 at the US capital and on the US rushed departure from Afghanistan, Raisi stated the obvious:

“From the Capitol to Kabul, one clear message was sent to the world: the US hegemonic system has no credibility, whether inside or outside the country.” (3)

And yet, the Biden Administration believes it can decide who is “democratic” and who is not, to sanction countries. Among these sanctioned countries is Cuba blockaded for more than 60 years. Cuba who sends doctors to many countries around the world to provide medical services others do not provide and saving thousands of human lives. Cuba, alone among Third World nations in its capacity to develop successful COVID19 vaccines and vaccinating its entire population in a timely, effective manner. Cuba protecting women from discrimination and stipulating, through Family Law, a man’s obligation to share household chores, cooking and childcare with his wife. Cuba protecting children, its own and the world, by providing medical care for example to the children of Chernobyl — more than 18,000 Ukrainian children treated over the years at the Tarara facility close to Havana.

Fidel, who often explained Cuba in its defense of human rights, said:

“We have made universal literacy possible, made it possible for every child to go to school, made it possible for every citizen to get an education. In the fields of education and health there is no country in the Third World, or even in developed capitalist world that has done what we have done in those areas for the good of people. Drugs use and gambling have also disappeared. You will not find children begging in the streets, we do not have homeless beggars here or children sleeping in the streets, or barefoot, or malnourished or not going to school.” (4)

And yet, human rights have been used against Cuba by the US. Still, every year at the United Nations General Assembly Cuba gains more votes against the blockade when presenting its Resolution to condemn it. In 2005 more than 180 countries supported Cuba’s Resolution — only the US, Israel and two island states in the Pacific whose livelihood depended on the US voted against Cuba. It was admirable, Fidel argued in 2005, that dozens and dozens of countries with credits pending with either the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank and depending on the US, would vote with Cuba. The ballot is public, Fidel added, *“If the voting in Geneva were secret, they (the US) would never win any initiative in any subject.”* (4)

In 2021, the Cuban Resolution against the blockade presented for 29th time at the UN General Assembly was supported by 184 countries of the world, only the US and Israel voted against Cuba. Regardless of international opinion, the US blockade against Cuba continues, made worse by additional sanctions. Cuba defends itself, Fidel has said, or it would not exist. Cuba has resisted the blockade -the hostility, aggression, economic warfare and increased sanctions. No country, he argued, would have been able to do this without the support of its people.

“I think there is not a country with a cleaner history with respect to human rights than Cuba. What the Revolution has done for our population can be expressed in numbers that no other state is able to claim.” (4)

In 2005 Fidel asked the crucial question, relevant today:

“Is this the country that people want to condemn for violations of human rights?”

No, of course not, 90 percent of the countries of the world state this over and over again at the UN General Assembly for close to 30 years.

“Only through lies and calumnies can such profoundly dishonest accusations be made.” A true statement in 2005 and today. Dishonesty explains the doublespeak of the US and its leaders. In the meantime, Cuba continues to be living proof of a crucial truth: peoples can resist and build a better world for themselves.

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Notes

1. Chris Hedges on the Privatized Prison System Industry <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EPsTKHgpqMQ>
2. Laura Findley, Facing the facts about gun violence in the US, <https://www.counterpunch.org/2021/12/03/facing-the-facts-about-gun-violence-in-the-u-s/>
3. Ebrahim Raisi at the UN General Assembly in September 21, 2021 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m32kx8SINVk>
4. Fidel Castro, My Life -with Ignacio Ramonet. (2007) Penguin Books.

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