

From Cuba to Iran: Sanctions are war

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The news headline says the president is announcing new sanctions. What is a sanction? College sport fans have heard about NCAA sanctioning teams for a gambling scandal, costing the team a vacated win or forfeited game. The casual observer might think a sanction isn't such a big deal then.

It is a big deal though. Sanctions are economic warfare.

Iran, Venezuela and Cuba are countries we may think of first, but what about Zimbabwe, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea or Syria and the many other "sanctioned" countries? Let me point out that not one of them is an imperialist government or former colonial ruler.

Where is the sanction on the U.S. for its crimes against humanity right now on the U.S. southern border? Where is the sanction on Israel for its snipers killing and intentionally maiming protesting Palestinians, the genocide and land theft perpetrated on the Palestinian people?

No, whether unilaterally imposed by the U.S. or rubber stamped by the United Nations, international sanctions are very different from a college basketball game.

Sanctions-like trade wars, the "anti-terror" campaign, targeted drone assassinations-are used by the U.S. as a lower-cost, lower-risk action to try to force another country to give in to imperialist demands. No U.S. body bags to arouse public anger while using economic rules to inflict hardships.

Sanctions cost lives

A stunning example of the cost of sanctions is Iraq from 1991 until the U.S. invasion in 2003-twelve years of brutal sanctions followed by the U.S. invasion and

occupation. Sanctions included denying Iraq the famous “dual-use” items, like chlorine, which prevented Iraq from treating its water.

Infamously, Madeleine Albright, secretary of state under Bill Clinton and later UN ambassador, told Leslie Stahl on 60 Minutes that the death of 500,000 children from U.S. sanctions was “worth it.” She since has tried to absolve herself and the government she represented by saying food and medicine were allowed. But what about clean water and infrastructure like hospitals?

And so it is today. We have only to look at Venezuela, where the corporate news agencies like Reuters and the Associated Press (according to Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting) ignored or rather refused to publish a study reporting 40,000 Venezuelan deaths in 2017 and 2018 due to the U.S. sanctions.

Every year in a report to the UN, Cuba details the cost to the Cuban people of the U.S. blockade in effect since 1960 against their country. On Nov. 6, for the 27th consecutive time, the UN General Assembly will speak for the world to tell the U.S. to end the blockade — a blockade called the longest genocide.

It is intentional harm. Why do we say this? On April 6, 1960, an internal State Department memo admits it was impossible to construct a credible opposition to the Cuban Revolution. The memo lays out what the U.S. government later put into effect:

“The only foreseeable means of alienating internal support is through disenchantment and disaffection based on economic dissatisfaction and hardship.

“If the above are accepted or cannot be successfully countered, it follows that every possible means should be undertaken promptly to weaken the economic life of Cuba. If such a policy is adopted, it should be the result of a positive decision which would call forth a line of action which, while as adroit and inconspicuous as possible,

makes the greatest inroads in denying money and supplies to Cuba, to decrease monetary and real wages, to bring about hunger, desperation and overthrow of government.”

According to the Council on Foreign Relations, the second longest sanctions are against Iran.

In 1973, this strategy worked in Chile, overthrowing the elected socialist government of Salvador Allende. And we see the dirty hands of U.S. imperialism in Honduras, where a coup 10 years ago replaced a democratically elected popular government with a repressive dictatorship. And as a result, many Hondurans are seeking asylum in the U.S.

So what gives the U.S. the right?

The point I am trying to make here is that sanctions are more than a U.S. policy imposed sometimes with a kinder/gentler face and at another time with a crude and bellicose personality.

Sanctions are part of an economic system agreed to by world imperialist and former colonial powers after World War II. It was established in hopes of controlling the competition between countries for advantages in exploiting the people of the world and their resources, especially oil. These are the root capitalist rivalries that led to the massive human sacrifice and destruction of productive capabilities in both World War I and World War II.

An international conference at Bretton Woods in New Hampshire established the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund and the proposal for the United Nations. It also agreed to unrestricted trade between countries.

The U.S. dollar was set as the reserve currency for international buying and selling. This means that international trade must come through U.S. banking institutions,

enhanced in our times with digital monitoring. Billions of dollars in fines have been levied against European banks by the U.S. Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Asset Controls for violating sanctions. Circumventing the sanctions is labeled "money laundering," again a characterization that is publicly palatable.

U.S. government agencies have imposed fines totaling \$1.34 billion on the French bank Société Générale (SG) for transactions that violated sanctions on Cuba and other countries. The [Miami Herald of Nov. 20, 2018](#), wrote:

"The more that the Trump administration weaponizes the DOT (OFAC) and DOJ, the less likely will be governments to engage with Cuba as the risk of exposure will be greater than the benefit to engagement with Cuba."

Such are "smart" sanctions that reportedly do not hurt the people—the risk of trade with a sanctioned country is greater than the benefit.

This French bank has also been sued under Title III of Helms Burton in a new extraterritorial action against a U.S. ally.

Global economic decline and capitalist contraction intensify these economic conflicts, of which sanctions are a part.

Internationally, it mirrors the struggles we face daily inside the U.S. When a bank forecloses on a home or apartment building, what recourse do working people have?

Only in the case of the U.S. mining Nicaragua's harbors has an international judgement ever been won against the U.S. But it could not be enforced because the U.S. blocked it in the UN Security Council.

We rejoice as the MOVE family is released from prison, but see the prison-for-profit, racist, repressive system continue.

There is a global war of capitalism against the working class and oppressed people of the world.

So, as we fight the attacks on our migrant and immigrant neighbors and to free the detained children and working-class families held so shamefully and cruelly on the border, as we say no war on Iran and Venezuela and end the blockade of Cuba, it is important to remember how much we are connected and our struggles are connected.

By uniting our struggles, we can win.

