

U.S. threatens ‘piracy’ while Iran and Venezuela continue trade

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July 19, 2020



Workers celebrate the arrival of Iranian oil tanker Fortune in Puerto Cabello,

Venezuela, on May 25.

The U.S. has not backed off attempts to block Iran-Venezuela trade. The new attacks are asset forfeiture through U.S. courts targeting “shipping companies, insurers, certifiers and flag states that register vessels,” according to a July 13 [Reuters report](#).

In May, five tankers from Iran successfully delivered gasoline and other supplies to Venezuela, breaking the U.S. starvation blockade that is damaging human lives in both countries. Although threatening the Iranian tankers with U.S. Navy warships, surveillance aircraft and special forces teams lurking off the coast of Venezuela, Washington backed off from direct military intervention.

At that time, Iran justifiably reminded the imperial U.S. that it can control access to the Straits of Hormuz, described as “the world’s most important oil transit chokepoint” by the [U.S. Energy Information Administration](#). In 2018, some 21 percent of global petroleum liquid shipments passed through these narrow shipping lanes.

On July 1, U.S. federal prosecutors filed a civil-forfeiture complaint to seize the gasoline cargo in four more tankers heading from Iran to Venezuela. It is unlikely that a civil forfeiture court order could seize or auction the cargo unless the tanker was in U.S. waters. But the threat of U.S. military action looms, using an asset forfeiture order from a U.S. court as a pretext.

In civil forfeiture, government agents seize assets — cars or cash, for example — from people suspected of criminal or illegal activity, often without bothering to charge the owners with any crimes. Poor people without bank accounts, who must rely on cash transactions, are frequently victimized by police in this way. In many U.S. states, Black and Brown drivers are targets for this legalized theft.

Even the [U.S. Justice Department](#) called attempting to use asset forfeiture internationally, where sovereign countries do not recognize U.S. authority, “a waste of U.S. prosecutorial and judicial resources.”

“Alireza Miryousefi, a spokesperson for the Iranian Mission to the United Nations, said any attempt by the U.S. to prevent Iran’s lawful trading with any country of its choosing would be an act of ‘piracy, pure and simple,’” the [Associated Press reported](#) July 2.

“‘This is a direct threat to international peace and security and in contravention of international law including the U.N. Charter,’ he said in a statement.”

