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USA - Iran, Venezuela and Cuba

Murder by Sanctions

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AS THE GLOBAL death toll from the coronavirus stretches deep into the hundreds of thousands and while Donald Trump continues his daily grandstanding misleadership, political manipulation and piracy of critical medical supplies, false claims of miracle cures (in which he has personal financial interests), sabotaging his own public health experts, absurdities about "reopening the economy" by May 1, and retaliatory firing of officials who exposed his criminal extortion of Ukraine other crises haven't gone away. Quite the contrary.

Among many underpublicized issues are the crippling, constantly tightening U.S. punitive sanctions against "enemy" governments including in particular Iran, Venezuela and Cuba. These sanctions were murderous before the coronavirus outbreak, particularly in regard to public health. Under present conditions, such measures border on genocidal.

It appears that Cuba, which has been under U.S. imperialist blockages for close to six decades, is avoiding the worst impact. Cuba has actually sent doctors to assist some worse-hit countries. (Trump's near-total U.S. ban on tourism to the island may have been a medical lucky break, although economically ruinous.) But along with the collapse of oil prices, U.S. prohibitions of financial transactions are particularly catastrophic for Iran and Venezuela.

In the Iranian case, European promises to construct a bypass for commercial transactions in order to save the multi-party nuclear deal have fallen flat. It's been an almost total, although largely predictable, failure of Europe's ruling classes and governments to stand up against Washington's dictates. Desperately needed medical supplies are simply unavailable, especially in rural Iran.

It can be argued that the Iranian regime was irresponsible, complacent and cynical in its early dismissal of the coronavirus disaster - particularly in the religious authorities' refusal to close the shrines in Qom and mass gatherings there, which appears to have been an epicenter for the pandemic spread to Pakistan, Afghanistan and the Middle East.

But this says only that Iran's rulers are (almost) as ignorant and bankrupt as Donald Trump himself - an impossibly difficult standard to match - and that some of its religious "leaders" are as criminal as those godly U.S. pastors who keep their megachurches open, and state governors who call churches "essential services" while forcing the closure of abortion clinics.

In the case of Venezuela, imperial criminality goes beyond even economic sanctions. Following the failure of last year's abortive military putsch against the Nicolas Maduro government, the U.S. Department of Justice a title George Orwell couldn't have dreamed up chose this moment to indict Maduro himself of drug trafficking.

Never mind, for example, the drug connections of the Honduran president and U.S. ally Juan Orlando Hernandez. The only purpose of the Maduro indictment can be to incite a second military coup attempt, with the incentive of a big reward for his extradition - which would provoke all-out civil war in a country already in a condition of medical and social near-collapse.

Imagine the refugee crisis in such a scenario. Isn't that just what Venezuela and Latin America need at this moment of a spreading global pandemic for which many of their health services are desperately underprepared?

Murder by Sanctions

While the U.S. assault on Iran has a material geopolitical "logic" in terms of controlling oil supplies, Washington's alliance with Saudi Arabia and other strategic state interests, the anti-Venezuela campaign appears to be driven mainly by rightwing ideology run amok. It's not a conflict that most of U.S. capital particularly wants or needs.

Nothing about Venezuela (sadly) is a "threat" to U.S. power in its ruined condition. If anything, history teaches us that wars and threats of war driven primarily by ideology are even more dangerous than those based on naked state interest, which are bad enough.

It's important here to call out the bipartisan U.S. complicity in Israel's blockade of Gaza, which long before coronavirus has destroyed the medical infrastructure serving Gaza's desperately crowded population. While imposing brutal sanctions on other countries, Trump and much of the Congress are trying to criminalize the BDS (boycott/divestment/sanctions) campaign supporting Palestinian rights. The looming explosion of the virus in Gaza is an indictment of the so-called "international community" that deserves close attention in its own right.

In the present terrifying global circumstances, the deliberate destruction by sanctions of whole nations' economies and health infrastructure is not only an attack against the peoples of those countries. It will have a horrific blowback effect on the entire international struggle against a deadly pandemic. The phrase "crime against humanity" has never been more apt.

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