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Role of sanctions in U.S. plan for world domination – a commentary



By Samuel Thomas

Sanctions: This is the well-known method of spreading democracy and prosperity through death, starvation, shortages and economic collapse. Throughout U.S. history, this method of regime change, ostensibly intended to be implemented against countries at war or allied to a country at war with the U.S., they are almost exclusively used against countries that are opponents of U.S. military and economic imperialism or have leftist or left-leaning governments.

This article does not contain an exhaustive list, as the U.S. has sanctions against about 39 countries, but the four countries covered here are particularly brutal examples of U.S. sanctions trying to instigate the working classes in each country to force an overthrow of the government

The primary purpose of sanctions is to pressure and manipulate people, by means of starvation and severe economic hardship, into overthrowing their governments — invariably those that the U.S. considers a threat to its economic domination, or a regional rival such as Iran in the Middle East, or a country that resists the imposition of neoliberal capitalism. Sanctions can also be used in preparation for a U.S.-led war or a U.S.-backed proxy war.

In most cases, the U.S. justifies these aggressive actions by pointing out alleged human right abuses in the targeted countries or by linking targeted governments to terrorism. In the cases of Iran and Iraq, which have been accused of being linked to al-Qaeda, ISIS, and other Islamist terrorist organizations, these accusations do not stand up to scrutiny. Iran is 90 percent to 95 percent Shia. So the idea of Iran supporting the Sunni fundamentalist Jihadists of the Islamic State group (IS) and al-Qaeda — who consider Shia Islam to be Islamic heresy and have killed scores of Shia observants in Iraq and Syria — flies in the face of all evidence and logic.

It is no small irony that the U.S. is allied with two of the world's biggest sponsors of terrorism. One is Pakistan, which through its Inter-Services Intelligence agency, has sponsored Jihadist groups, including al-Qaeda. The other is Saudi Arabia, a murderous absolute monarchy whose state religion is the extreme version of Sunni Islam known as Wahhabism (Salafism). That is the ideology of most Sunni Jihadists, and the Saudi kingdom was the home of most of the Sept. 11, 2001, attackers.

The Saudis have also funded extremist groups in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Chechnya. The U.S. has sold billions of dollars worth of arms to both countries and has consistently paid no attention to their horrific human rights abuses. Obviously, human rights matter less when a government is compliant with U.S. imperialism and sits on millions of barrels of oil.

These patterns repeat themselves across the globe. In South America and the Caribbean, U.S. sanctioning of leftist states and support for right-wing dictatorships and insurgencies have been especially destructive.

One clear example is Washington's support for the regime of Fulgencio Batista in Cuba, its hundreds of unsuccessful attempts to assassinate Fidel Castro and its support for an invasion of Cuba by Cuban exiles. Another is the U.S. government's blatant, unsuccessful attempts at regime change in Venezuela by backing self-appointed "president" Juan Guaidó and Washington's subsequent support for an equally unsuccessful military coup.

These actions clarify that the U.S. views South America and the Caribbean not as a collection of sovereign countries, but as U.S. client states where its dictates must be obeyed or they risk invasion, economic ruin or a civil war instigated by U.S.-backed forces, invariably right-wingers.

Here is a closer look at the countries that are the main targets of U.S. sanctions.

U.S. punishes Iranian people

On Jan. 16, 1979, Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, the U.S.-backed dictator of Iran, fled into exile in the face of mass demonstrations against his rule. The remnant of his royalist state was overthrown less than a month later on Feb. 11. In response to the Iranian revolution and the U.S. Embassy hostage crisis, the U.S. instituted sanctions in November 1979, initially freezing \$12 billion of Iranian assets and cutting off trade and diplomatic relations.

Under President Ronald Reagan, further sanctions were instituted in 1987. Recently, these sanctions were tightened even further due to Iran's alleged nuclear weapons program. They have become even more draconian since the rise of President Donald Trump who abrogated the 2015 nuclear agreement, with which the Iranian government had been in compliance.

The effects of these sanctions have been a disaster. Oil revenues are a major source of revenue for Iran. With the implementation of sanctions, exports of oil have fallen from

2.5 million barrels a day to about 250,000. Government services have been severely affected, especially medical care.

Iran's hospitals face serious shortages of almost everything, including drugs for the treatment of over 30 conditions and diseases, including cancer and heart disease. Hemophiliacs face extreme difficulty in getting clotting medications and often have to resort to a thriving medical underground market.

Living standards have been severely affected. Inflation is above 30 percent, and the Iranian rial has decreased in value from 60 percent to 80 percent. Unemployment is officially reported at 11.9 percent, but is almost certainly higher. Those who have jobs get stagnant wages and are paid infrequently, if at all. Industrial workers are hit hard, with many unable to live in industrial suburbs and having to travel to work at great cost. Rents have skyrocketed.

These sanctions exempt humanitarian aid and food, but little gets through because shipping and insurance companies are reluctant to do business with Iran out of fear of U.S. government fines or other punitive actions. Iran also is barred from using many international monetary pay systems.

Sanctions killed 560,000 Iraqi children

After the 1991 Gulf War, in which the U.S. and other Western and Middle Eastern powers aided a U.S.-compliant oil puppet in Kuwait against a non-U.S.-compliant oil government in Iraq, a particularly brutal series of sanctions wrought misery on Iraq for 13 years. Imposed on Aug. 6, 1990, by a United Nations Security Council resolution, it was made clear from the start that sanctions would remain as long as Saddam Hussein remained in power.

These sanctions devastated the Iraqi economy, leading to a catastrophic collapse in medical services, food availability and living standards. As journalist Patrick Cockburn, who witnessed the events, wrote in his book "The Age of Jihad," Iraqis became so desperate that they dug up landmines left over from the Iran-Iraq war and disarmed them to sell the metal.

An estimated 3,000 people in Iraq's Kurdish region along the Iranian border died from landmine injuries over 10 years, although this is surely an underestimation. Such desperation was the result of skyrocketing food prices, plummeting wages and an inadequate-to-nonexistent infrastructure that was a direct result of U.S. sanctions.

Between January and August of 1991, an estimated 46,900 Iraqi children died as a direct or indirect result of sanctions. By 1995, this number had jumped to about 560,000. Infant mortality was counted at 131 per 1,000 live births. One of the prime exacerbating factors was the collapse of Iraq's health care system. A 1996 report stated that over half of its diagnostic machines were inoperable due to a lack of spare parts, as well as a severe shortage of drugs.

Vaccination rates plummeted. This, combined with a lack of safe water and sanitation, caused cholera to increase fivefold. Typhoid cases increased by 60 percent, and a major measles outbreak occurred in 1998. Cases of tetanus and diphtheria spiked.

Despite all this suffering, Saddam Hussein was not overthrown, but he was removed from power after a joint U.S.-British invasion in 2003 [and then executed three years later]. Conditions for ordinary Iraqis deteriorated even more, culminating in the 2006-07 sectarian civil war between Shia and Sunni that was brought on by the U.S. occupation.

U.S. goal: End Cuban socialism

The longest-running U.S. sanctions have been aimed against the island of socialist Cuba. On Oct. 19, 1960, nearly two years after Fidel Castro and his 26th of July Movement overthrew U.S.-backed dictator Fulgencio Batista, the U.S. imposed an embargo on all exports to Cuba and stopped all sugar cane imports to the U.S.

The catalyst for this blockade was the Cuban government's nationalization of U.S.-owned oil refineries without compensation to the capitalists who owned them.

On Feb. 3, 1962, this embargo was extended to all trade, with no mechanism to ease sanctions. Later, in 1963, the U.S. Department of the Treasury imposed Cuban Assets Control Regulations, which froze all Cuban assets, severely restricted travel to Cuba by U.S. nationals and banned indirect imports or exports.

In 1992, the Cuban Democracy Act (Torricelli Act) was passed. Among other restrictions, it prevented Cubans living in the U.S. from sending remittances to their families in Cuba. Ostensibly, the CDA permits humanitarian supplies, but they are subject to on-site inspections, something the Cuban government justifiably will never allow, and which the U.S. does not have the power to enforce, except through military means. In practice, importation of humanitarian supplies is difficult, at best.

The CDA explicitly states that the goal of the bill is to force regime change so that a government which is compliant with U.S. and international capitalists can be installed. Part of the bill stresses that its job is: “To seek a peaceful transition to democracy and a resumption of economic growth in Cuba through the careful application of sanctions directed at the Castro government and in support of the Cuban people.” (tinyurl.com/y9o92ev7)

Anyone remotely familiar with the history of U.S. imperialism will have no difficulty reading between the lines. It may as well have stated: “We will starve and isolate you until you overthrow Castro, so get on that if you want to eat!” The text’s transparent pledge “in support of the Cuban people” is farcical. Even a cursory examination of the embargo’s effects on ordinary Cubans reveals how deceitful this pledge is.

The U.S. blockade has cost Cuba a staggering \$300 billion to \$700 billion in lost revenue and shortages over six decades. There are widespread shortages of food, medicine, spare parts and other necessities. Cuban doctors, despite being some of the best in the region, have access to less than 50 percent of the drugs on the global market. Antiretrovirals and cancer treatment drugs are especially difficult to come by, and so are advanced medical technology and replacement parts for medical machines.

Needless to say, ordinary Cubans bear the brunt of these sanctions. After six decades, the Cuban people have not overthrown their socialist leaders, as U.S. imperialists hoped.

Washington aims to oust Maduro

The U.S. and other imperialist powers have made a concerted effort to overthrow the Venezuelan government of Nicolás Maduro. This accelerated in 2017 when the Trump regime imposed sanctions and openly threatened the possibility of military intervention.

These sanctions and the even more restrictive sanctions instituted after Jan. 23, 2019, when Juan Guaidó declared himself president of Venezuela and was immediately recognized by Washington, have been utterly catastrophic for the country. Sanctions were tightened after the failed April 2019 pro-Guaidó military coup.

The 2017 sanctions dealt a near mortal blow to Venezuela's already struggling health care system. Some 80,000 people with HIV/AIDS cannot access antiretroviral drugs, 16,000 people in need of dialysis cannot get it, and 16,000 cancer patients have minimal-to-no access to treatment. There is a drastic shortage of medication, which puts the health and lives of at least 300,000 people at risk.

The Venezuelan economy, which derives 90 percent of its revenues through oil exports, has contracted a shocking 60 percent since 2013. The Trump administration confiscated CITGO, the U.S. subsidiary of Venezuela's state-owned oil company PDVSA, which had major consequences for the South American country's economy. The Trump administration also froze \$5.5 billion of Venezuela's assets.

The effects of these actions have been devastating for Venezuela's working class. The minimum wage is currently around \$4. Some 20 percent of homes do not have clean running water due to lack of the parts needed to fix pumps and pipes. Residents rely on trucks to deliver water, but the number of trucks has decreased by 75 percent due to lack of parts. (tinyurl.com/y936evkd)

The wealthier residents of Venezuela, many, if not most of whom support Maduro's ouster, have weathered the storm for the most part. As always, poor and working-class people are the ones starved and killed by sanctions.

Imperialism's evil objectives

There is no mistaking the intentions of U.S. sanctions. Governments that do not conform to U.S. imperialism and global capitalism, or are rivals for regional influence, can expect to have their economies ruined. The working class bears the brunt of the devastation. The ruling class, by virtue of who they are, is seldom severely affected.

Sanctions are designed to force deprivation and suffering on the working class and poor to the point that they will overthrow the current governments and create the conditions for

the installation of a U.S.-backed regime — in order to lay the groundwork for neoliberal capitalism to exploit a country's resources and people.

For more fact sheets, campaigns, webinars, petitions and information on 39 countries sanctioned by the U.S. see SanctionsKill.org

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