

Coronavirus: Sanctions and Suffering

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In the midst of the most horrendous crisis to confront the entire human family in recent decades, the United States elite, it appears, is hell-bent on perpetuating massive sanctions against certain states and affecting regime change in some of them. Sanctions cause much pain and suffering and even death on a wide scale. One would have thought that given what the global Coronavirus pandemic has wrought in the US, its elite would seek to lift sanctions it has imposed upon societies determined to protect their independence and sovereignty.

By looking at three well-known victims of US sanctions, we shall show how the coronavirus crisis has helped to bring to the fore some of the issues that challenge them. Iran has been under comprehensive sanctions which have become increasingly harsh since 1980. There is no need to emphasise that it is because Iran after the Islamic Revolution of February 1979 refused to yield to US dictates and chose to champion the Palestinian cause through deeds rather than words that it found itself the target of the superpower of the day. Iran has made it very clear that though it is going through great difficulties as a result of the Coronavirus it will not accept any assistance from the US unless the US lifts the sanctions. It has however applied for financial help from the IMF which according to some sources has been blocked by the US government that exercises considerable influence over that multilateral institution. China and other countries from the European Union have come to Iran's aid.

It is significant that citizens' organisations in Iran have extended a hand to the poorer segment of US society which is bearing the brunt of the pandemic that has now crippled the country. Cuba is yet another country under US sanctions for much longer — since 1961 — which has also reached out to the people of the US. The entire world as demonstrated year in, and year out, in the UN General Assembly — with the exception of the US and Israel — wants the sanctions against Cuba lifted. And yet the US government arrogantly perpetuates the blockade even in the midst of the Coronavirus that has killed more than 10,000 Americans. It is worth noting that Cuba with its limited resources has done more than most other countries in trying to assist other virus stricken countries in various parts of the world.

Venezuela is a third country under severe mainly US sanctions that has been forced to pay a huge price for its legitimate desire to protect its independence and sovereignty. As with Iran and Cuba, it is not just sanctions that are employed to suffocate Venezuela. There was a coup in April 2002 against then Venezuelan president, the late Hugo Chavez in order to affect a regime change which failed because of people power. Now in 2020 the adversaries of the Venezuelan people have hatched a bizarre tale of current president Nicoló Maduro's involvement in international drug trafficking with the aim of flooding the US market with cocaine. An utterly baseless and ludicrous charge if one knows anything at all about drug routes and production centres in the region, this is the latest attempt to oust the

democratically elected president in Caracas in the midst of a health pandemic.

It is obvious that the US elite's geopolitical machinations are as malicious as ever in spite of a crisis that has brought so much devastation and death to so many. It is because human suffering is so rife and rampant even in the US and the Western world that many of us are hoping the US elite will show some compassion and eliminate sanctions which have also caused so much pain and misery and loss of life to hundreds of thousands of human beings in almost every continent for decades. It is the same concern for human suffering that prompted some NGOs to call for a global ceasefire as the Coronavirus took its toll. The UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres has endorsed the plea. Many governments have also supported the call but they have not translated rhetoric into action.

The Coronavirus pandemic demands action. And many have acted to demonstrate global solidarity. In geopolitical terms, lifting sanctions and observing ceasefires in all the conflict zones would be convincing proof of our common humanity. They would reflect the truth of the wisdom embodied in the immortal lines of the 14th century poet Sheikh Saidi:

The human race is a single being
Created from one jewel
If one member is struck
All must feel the blow
Only someone who cares for the pain of others
Can truly be called human.

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