**Deporting Venezuelans**

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When the Biden Administration announced its intent to extend the southern border wall, as well as to begin deporting Venezuelans illegally entering the country, American news media were quick to discern the irony in President Biden building the wall that presidential candidate Biden had once dismissed as “not a serious policy solution.”

Yet somehow the irony of sending Venezuelans back to a country whose economy our government is actively trying to destroy seems to have escaped them entirely.

It’s not that the newsrooms would have had to work overtime to uncover the contradiction in policies. For instance, the Congressional Research Service (CRS) updated its report on the topic just this past August 8, noting that “US sanctions had worsened Venezuela’s economic decline and hindered some humanitarian aid delivery,” and referring the reader to a General Accounting Office (GAO) February 2021 statement that “the [Venezuelan] economy declined from negative 6.2 percent gross domestic product growth in 2015 to negative 35 percent in 2019 and negative 25 percent in 2020. The sanctions, particularly on the state oil company in 2019, likely contributed to the steeper decline of the Venezuelan economy, primarily by limiting revenue from oil production.”

In other words, our government’s sanctions policy was achieving its goal of making Venezuelans’ lives increasingly difficult, the most tangible evidence of which is the fact that 500,000 have now made the 3,000 mile trip to seek refuge in the country imposing the sanctions – many of them trekking through the hazardous Darien Gap jungle path from South to Central America. So many that there are now more migrants from Venezuela crossing the Mexican border than from any other nation but Mexico itself.

How is it that the press corps misses this connection? Well, the sanctions policy is now in its fourth presidential administration – with Congress also in the thick of it, so after 17 years it may not occur to many in the nation’s capital that there could be anything newsworthy about US economic sanctions imposed on Venezuela. But the CRS paper scanned the history for those interested, dating back to when Hugo Chavez was the country’s president: “the earliest sanctions ... related to Venezuela’s lack of cooperation on antidrug and counterterrorism efforts,” followed by “Obama Administration ... sanctions against individuals for human rights abuses, corruption, and antidemocratic actions” and “Trump Administration ... sanctions in response to the increasing authoritarianism of [Chavez successor] President Nicolas Maduro ... and in an effort to back the interim government led by Juan Guaido.”

And today Biden has continued the policy, albeit in somewhat loosened form, even with the Guaido alternative government – which never took power – now dissolved. In other words, it’s the same old same old in Washington – so, nothing to talk about there.

And what exactly are these sanctions? Over the years, Washington has prohibited commercial arms sales and retransfers to Venezuela; blocked the assets of various individuals; prohibited Venezuelan government access to US financial markets including for the state energy company (PdVSA); prohibited transactions involving the Venezuela’s issuance of digital currency, as well as transactions related to purchasing Venezuelan debt and any debt owed to Venezuela pledged as collateral; blocked all property and interests in property of PdVSA subject to US jurisdiction; prohibited US companies and individuals from engaging in transactions with the company; and extended financial sanctions and visa restrictions to foreign individuals and energy companies working with PdVSA. (The European Union has also enacted sanctions in some of these areas.)

The result? While it’s impossible to determine the exact degree to which the sanctions regime is responsible, the GAO reported inflation “often doubling every year. In 2010, the inflation rate was 28.2 percent; by 2017, it had reached 438 percent. This was an average monthly increase in the price of goods and services of 36.5 percent. In 2018, Venezuela experienced hyperinflation, which peaked at 65,374 percent. By 2020, the inflation rate had decreased, but remained extremely high at 6,500 percent.”

Also in 2021, the UN sent a ‘special rapporteur’ to investigate the situation. The subsequent report “on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights” – which drew little attention in mainstream American media – found the following:

“The scarcity of resources and reluctance of foreign partners, banks and delivery companies to deal with Venezuelan partners, mainly because of US sanctions, have resulted in the impossibility to buy the essential technological equipment and supplies for the repair and maintenance of public electricity, gas, water, transport, telephone and communication systems, as well as schools, hospitals and other public institutions, undermining the enjoyment and exercise of the most fundamental rights to life, food, water, health, housing and education.”

As for the health of the population, “The free and universal health care system established by the ‘Bolivarian Revolution’, severely undermined by the oil crisis, has deteriorated further since 2017 amid the economic and financial sanctions ... Venezuela is almost entirely dependent upon foreign medicine and medical supplies ... Sanctions have blocked purchases of items such as human albumin, immunoglobulin and other blood products ... and even antibiotics.”

Concerning drinking water, “The Minister in charge of water explained that only 50 percent of the system’s distribution units were running because of the impossibility to buy spare parts and to do maintenance ... water had to be distributed in rotation to ensure delivery to all ... 52 percent of the water distribution system uses US technology and 29 percent German and Swiss equipment ... impossible to invite relevant experts to perform maintenance ... forced to reduce by 30 percent the chemical agents used to treat and purify the water ... remaining Chinese company (Sino-hydro Corp.) is departing because payments could not be made due to blocked transactions.”

In terms of vital foreign trade, “sea transportation has reportedly dropped by 72 percent because shipping companies trading with the country have been sanctioned, and Venezuelan vessels cannot get the needed spare parts to be maintained and operated.”

Overall, “Non-governmental sources estimate that poverty increased dramatically between 2014 and 2020, reaching 94 percent of the people, of which 67 percent fell into extreme poverty and 64 percent into multidimensional poverty.”

And, the report added, “At the end of 2015, UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) estimated that 695,000 Venezuelans had left the country. In accordance with data provided by the Government and the immigration authorities of the host countries and NGOs (non-governmental organizations), migration figures varied from 1.2 to 5.6 million by May 2021.”

Excerpted: ‘Leave Venezuela! No, Go Back!’

Courtesy: Commondreams.org