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Civilians are the real victims (and targets) of Trump's Venezuela sanctions

25/04/2019



The Trump administration claims that its increasingly punitive sanctions on Venezuela “do not target the innocent people” but the government of President Nicolas Maduro. A new report on the effects of sanctions debunks that myth.

The [analysis](#), compiled by Mark Weisbrot and Jeffrey Sachs at the Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR), found that the sanctions have increased hunger, disease, mortality, have displaced millions of Venezuelans and exacerbated the country's economic crisis. Overall, the report says the measures have caused “*very serious harm to human life and health, including an estimated more than 40,000 deaths*” between 2017 and 2018.

Weisbrot and Sachs, both well-known American economists, wrote that:

***The sanctions in fact “fit the definition of collective punishment of the civilian population” as described by the Geneva and Hague conventions, as well as being “illegal under international law.”***

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Yet, a totally different narrative has been adopted by mainstream media in the US, which seems to unquestioningly accept the Trump administration's claims that civilians are not the targets. Ever since Trump recognized unelected opposition figure Juan Guaido as Venezuela's self-

declared *"interim president"* in January while calling for the overthrow of Maduro, big chunks of the media have cheered on his efforts. It barely even raised eyebrows when national security advisor John Bolton went on Fox News and [admitted](#) that oil was the US's major interest in the country.

Sanctions imposed by the White House in August 2017 prohibited the Venezuelan government from borrowing in US financial markets — a punishment which prevented it from being able to restructure its foreign debt and, in turn, hampering any possible economic recovery.

**That round of measures also impacted oil production, which crashed and was *"very likely the main shock that pushed the economy from its high inflation"* into a state of *"hyperinflation,"* the report says.**

[@RaniaKhalek](#) Study finds that US sanctions on Venezuela have killed at least 40,000 Venezuelans since 2014. Liberals who applaud sanctions should be ashamed

The fresh rounds of sanctions introduced in January and February 2019 cut Venezuela off from its largest oil market, the US, which had purchased 35.6 percent of its exports in 2018. Oil revenues are now projected to fall by a ***"cataclysmic and unprecedented"*** 67.5 percent from 2018 as a result of those measures and US pressure on other countries, including India, to refrain from buying Venezuelan oil. The 2019 sanctions have also cut Venezuela off from most international payments systems, ***"thus ending much of the country's access"*** to ***"essential imports including medicine and food."***

US sanctions have also **contributed *"substantially"*** to the *"the length and economic damage of power outages"* that occurred in March since they have limited Venezuela's access to diesel fuel, which it needs to run backup thermal generators.

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In a revealing exchange with AP reporter Matt Lee in March, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo as much as admitted that civilians are the real victims of US sanctions, saying the humanitarian crisis in Venezuela is ***"increasing by the hour"*** and ***"you can see the increasing pain and suffering"*** that the people are enduring.

If, as Pompeo claimed before, that *"innocent"* Venezuelans were not the targets, surely such visible increases in human suffering would be troubling to him and would perhaps make Washington think twice about imposing harsher and harsher measures. Yet, Pompeo appears to see increasing hardship as proof that sanctions are working, laying bare the reality that the US's goal is to inflict so much suffering that the people eventually revolt against Maduro and support US regime change efforts out of sheer desperation.

The CEPR report also highlights that US executive orders since March 2015 have declared the US is suffering from a *"national emergency"* with regard to the Venezuela crisis. Such a declaration is *"required by US law in order to impose such sanctions."* One of Trump's executive orders even describes the situation in Venezuela as ***"an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security"*** of the US — a claim which Weisbrot and Sachs say has *"no basis in fact."*

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The so-called “*emergency*” regarding Venezuela was invoked under the 1976 National Emergencies Act, which happens to be the same law Trump used to declare a “*national emergency*” at the US's southern border in February. That move prompted outrage across much of the mainstream media, but barely any media batted an eyelid when he declared Venezuela's domestic crisis to be a US national emergency.

Ultimately, despite claims to the contrary, Weisbrot and Sachs say that US sanctions have locked Venezuela into “***a downward economic spiral***” which has “***severe***” consequences for the civilian population.

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