For 28th consecutive year, Cuba prepares to indict U.S. blockade at United Nations

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For the 28th consecutive year, Cuba will be asking the United Nations General Assembly on Nov. 7 to approve a resolution calling for an end to the U.S. economic, commercial, and financial blockade of Cuba. Every year, in preparation for this vote, Cuba's Foreign Ministry delivers a comprehensive report to the various national delegations represented in the Assembly. It updates them on adverse effects of the blockade, especially new ones.

Speaking to reporters on Sept. 20, Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez released Cuba's report on the blockade for 2019. It's 37 pages long and concentrates on the impact of the blockade showing up between April 2018 and March 30, 2019.

Its format is similar to that of earlier reports. This report, like previous ones, utilizes hundreds of examples drawn from daily life in Cuba to demonstrate hardship caused by the blockade. The 2019 report once more analyzes blockade-related damage according to categories like violations of international law, genocide, the trashing of human rights, and economic hardship affecting every corner of Cuban society.

This report pays special attention to fallout from recent U.S. intensification of the blockade. It points to the hobbling of embassy operations in the two capitals, and to larger U.S. fines against third-country banks and companies involved with Cuba. There's mention of Cuban tourist facilities being off limits to U.S. visitors and of renewed restrictions on people-to-people travel to Cuba. The report prominently features the U.S. government's turn, after a lapse of 26 years, to implementing Title III of the Helms Burton Law of 1996.

Under Title III, former owners of nationalized properties, or their heirs, can now appeal to U.S. courts to gain compensation from third-country businesses occupying those properties. The idea is to advertise foreign investment in Cuba as extremely risky business. Cuba's economic development thereby takes a hit, in theory.

The new Cuban report is strong on details. It reviews U.S. laws and regulations buttressing the blockade over the course of decades. The report emphasizes the "social impact" of the blockade. It cites shortages, delays, unmet goals, and administrative snarls weighing on the healthcare, education, sports, cultural, and information-technology sectors.

According to the report, "The plans and programs of the 'dirty war' against Cuba have always included maneuvers aimed at promoting hunger and disease among the Cuban people and thereby undermining support for the Revolution."

The blockade's role in causing operational dysfunction in various sectors of the economy receives top billing in the report. It systematically documents troubles in construction, infrastructure, the biopharmaceutical industry, tourism, communications, information technology, industrial development, the energy sector, and banking.

Foreign banks, leery of being penalized by the U.S. Treasury Department, are shown to have often failed to transfer funds destined for Cuba. They've charged high commissions. Over 100 foreign banks now refuse to offer any services to Cuban banks. The upshot is that, most recently, Cuba's banking operations registered annual losses 35% greater than those of the previous year.

In the time frame covered by the report, Cuba's economy suffered $4.344 billion in losses. The report indicates that over the course of almost six decades the U.S. economic blockade has deprived Cuba of $922.6 billion (adjusted for inflation).

Surveying U.S. violations of international law, the report spotlights the "extra-territorial" thrust of U.S policies on Cuba, which in fact violate the sovereignty of many nations. The report ends with a long list of examples of resistance to the blockade both worldwide and within the United States. The most prominent of them is the overwhelming rejection of the blockade by the UN General Assembly every year for 27 years.

Presently, the sequence of a Cuban report, voting in the United Nations, and a few news reports is repetitive enough to be unthinkingly dismissed as a kind of routine business. But there's nothing commonplace about a U.S. policy that, as described by Cuba's Foreign Ministry, is "the most unjust, severe, and prolonged system of unilateral sanctions ever levied on any country."

Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez submitted the report to the United Nations. | Granma

Actually, the blockade and its varied ramifications are beyond extraordinary. For example: it's long, but how long is long? It began 59 years ago, in 1960. Three more jumps like that into the past and you'd be in 1783. That was when the U.S. Revolutionary War ended.

Now the blockade is more unrelenting than ever. The opening sentence of Cuba's current report makes the point: "[I]ntensification of the blockade continues to be the central axis of U.S. policies toward Cuba."

Its continuation despite yearly condemnation in the General Assembly testifies to U.S. disregard of world opinion. That the blockade persists despite solidarity efforts on Cuba's behalf both internationally and in the United States calls for unsparing analysis.

In its evolution, the blockade conveys lessons about how international politics work. The blockade typifies the U.S. capitalist government's propensity to work its way through nefarious means. Persistence of the blockade points to the painful lack of internationally sanctioned collective mechanisms for enforcing norms of justice and decency.

Critics denounce the blockade as illegal, immoral, and cruel. The yield of doing so is not obvious. Seeing that, left-leaning political theorists of a scientific bent could well point out that the blockade's long life confirms their presumption that the force of ideas is not enough, alone, to bring about necessary societal change.

Against all odds, however, Cuba's socialist revolution remains undefeated. There are reasons. It's no miracle. From the 19th century on, Cuba has nurtured a culture and tradition of rebellion. From then on, the quality of revolutionary leadership—José *Martí, for example*—has been high. Working people in Cuba, awake and informed, have long tended to join together for the sake of their common good. And not least, the high and mighty reacted to the Revolution by abandoning the island.