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The gruesome images that emerged from the rubble were broadcast through television sets across the world and caused unprecedented outrage. The political backlash forced U.S. policy makers to devise a more subtle weapon of mass destruction: economic sanctions. The term "weapons of mass destruction" (WMD) was first defined by the United Nations in 1948 as "atomic explosive weapons, radioactive material weapons, lethal chemical and biological weapons, and any weapons developed in the future which have characteristics comparable in destructive effect to those of the atomic bomb or other weapons mentioned above".

Sanctions are clearly the 21st century's deadliest weapon of mass destruction. In 2001, the U.S. administration told us that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction; Iraq was a terrorist state; Iraq was tied to Al Qaeda. It all amounted to nothing. In fact, America already knew that the only weapons of mass destruction that Saddam had were not nuclear in nature, but rather chemical and biological. The only reason they knew this in advance was because America sold the weapons to Saddam to use on Iran in 1991.

What the U.S. administration did not tell us was that Saddam Hussein used to be a strong ally of the United States. The main reason for toppling Saddam and putting sanctions on the people of Iraq was the fact that Iraq had ditched the Dollar-for-Oil sales.

The United Nations estimates that 1.7 million Iraqis died due to Bill Clinton's sanctions; 500,000 of whom were children. In 1996, a journalist asked former U.S. Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, about these UN reports, specifically about the children. America's top foreign policy official, Albright, replied: "I think this is a very hard choice, but the price - we think the price is



President Chavez funnelled Venezuela's oil revenues into social spending. PHOTO: AFP

worth it." Clearly, U.S. sanctions policies are nothing short of state-sanctioned genocide.

Over the last five years, sanctions have caused Venezuelan per capita incomes to drop by 40 percent, which is a decline similar to that of war torn Iraq and Syria at the height of their armed conflicts. Millions of Venezuelans have had to flee the country. If America is so concerned about refugees, Trump should stop



An anti-imperialist mural in Caracas.

PHOTO: REUTERS

furthering disastrous foreign policies that actually create them. Under Chavez, Venezuela had a policy of welcoming refugees. President Chavez turned Venezuela into the wealthiest society in Latin America with the best income equality.

Another much vilified leader who used oil wealth to enrich his people, only to be put under severe sanctions, is Muammar Gaddafi. In 1967 Colonel Gaddafi inherited one of the poorest nations in Africa; however, by the time he was assassinated, Gaddafi had turned Libya into Africa's wealthiest nation. Perhaps, Gaddafi's greatest crime, in the eyes of NATO, was his quest to quit selling Libyan oil in U.S. dollars and denominate crude sales in a new gold backed common African currency. In fact,

particularly the elite in charge of the petrodollar system.

It is for this reason that President Clinton signed the now infamous Iran-Libya Sanctions Act, which the United Nations Children's Fund said caused widespread suffering among civilians by "severely limiting supplies of fuel, access to cash, and the means of replenishing stocks of food and essential medications." Clearly, U.S. sanctions are weapons of mass destruction.

Not so long ago, Iraq and Libya were the two most modern and secular states in the Middle East and North Africa, with the highest regional standards of living. Nowadays, U.S. military intervention and economic sanctions have turned Libya and Iraq into two of the world's most failed nations.

"They want to seize Libya's oil and they care nothing about the lives of the Libyan people," remarked Chavez during the Western intervention in Libya in 2011.

In September 2017, President Maduro made good on Chavez's promise to list oil sales in yuan rather than the US dollar. Weeks later Trump signed a round of crippling sanctions on the people of Venezuela.

On Monday, U.S. National Security adviser John Bolton announced new sanctions that essentially steal \$7 billion from Venezuela's state owned oil company. At that press conference Bolton brazenly flashed a note pad that ominously said "5,000 troops to Colombia". When confronted about it by the media, Bolton simply said, "President Trump stated that all options are on the table".

America's media is unquestionably the most corrupt institution in America. The nation's media may quibble about Trump's domestic policies but when it comes to starting wars for oil abroad they sing in remarkable unison. *Fox News*, *CNN* and the *New York Times* all cheered the nation into war in Iraq over fictitious weapons of mass destruction, whilst America was actually using sanctions of mass destruction on the Iraqi people. They did it in Libya and now they are doing it again in Venezuela. Democracy

and freedom have always been the smoke screen in front of capitalist expansion for oil, and the Western media owns the smoke machine. Economic warfare has long since been under way against Venezuela but military warfare is now imminent.

Trump just hired Elliot Abrams as U.S. Special Envoy for Venezuela, who has a long and torrid history in Latin America. Abrams pleaded guilty to lying to Congress about the Iran Contra affair, which involved America funding deadly communist rebels, and was the worst scandal in the Reagan Era. Abrams was later pardoned by George Bush Senior. America's new point man on Venezuela also lied about the largest mass killing in recent Latin American history by U.S. trained forces in El Salvador.

There is nothing more undemocratic than a coup d'état. A UN Human Rights Council Rapporteur, Alfred de Zayas, pointed out that America's aim in Venezuela is to "crush this government and bring in a neoliberal government that is going to privatise everything and is going to sell out, a lot of transitional corporations stand to gain enormous profits and the United States is driven by the transnational corporations."

Ever since 1980, the United States has steadily devolved from the status of the world's top creditor country to the world's most indebted country. But thanks to the petrodollar system's huge global artificial demand for U.S. dollars, America can continue exponential military expansion, record breaking deficits and unrestrained spending.

America's largest export used to be manufactured goods made proudly in America. Today, America's largest export is the U.S. dollar. Any nation like Venezuela that threatens that export is met with America's second largest export: weapons, chief amongst which are sanctions of mass destruction.

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