

# Report

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*“The US Appears to be Destined by Providence to Plague the Americas with Misery in the Name of Freedom.”—Simón Bolívar, 1829*



*(Photo: Prensa Evo)*

## Ending Regime Change — in Bolivia and the World

*By Medea Benjamin and Nicolas J. S. Davies, co-founder and researcher (respectively) at CodePink*

Less than a year after the United States and the US-backed Organization of American States (OAS) supported a violent military coup to overthrow the government of Bolivia, the Bolivian people have reelected the Movement for Socialism (MAS) and restored it to power.

In the long history of US-backed “regime changes” in countries around the world, rarely have a people and a country so firmly and democratically repudiated US efforts to dictate how they will be governed. Post-coup interim president Jeanine Añez has reportedly requested 350 US visas for herself and others who may face prosecution in Bolivia for their roles in the coup.

The narrative of a rigged election in 2019 that the US and the OAS peddled to support the coup in Bolivia has been thoroughly debunked. MAS’s support is mainly from indigenous Bolivians in the countryside, so it takes longer for their ballots to be collected and counted than

those of the better-off city dwellers who support MAS’s right-wing, neoliberal opponents.

As the votes come in from rural areas, there is a swing to MAS in the vote count. By pretending that this predictable and normal pattern in Bolivia’s election results was evidence of election fraud in 2019, the OAS bears responsibility for unleashing a wave of violence against indigenous MAS supporters that, in the end, has only delegitimized the OAS itself.

It is instructive that the failed US-backed coup in Bolivia has led to a more democratic outcome than US regime change operations that succeeded in removing a government from power. Domestic debates over US foreign policy routinely presume that the US has the right, or even an obligation, to deploy an arsenal of military, economic and political weapons to force political change in countries that resist its imperial dictates.

In practice, this means either full-scale war (Iraq and Afghanistan), a coup d’état (Haiti in 2004, Honduras in 2009), covert and proxy wars (as in Syria) or

punitive economic sanctions (as against Cuba, Iran and Venezuela)—all of which violate the sovereignty of the targeted countries and are therefore illegal under international law.

No matter which instrument of regime change the US has deployed, these US interventions have not made life better for the people of any of those countries, nor countless others in the past. Most of these operations involved US efforts to remove popularly elected

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## SOUTH AMERICA

*Bolivia, continued from front page*

governments from power, as in Bolivia, and often replaced them with US-backed dictatorships: like General Pinochet in Chile.

Even when the targeted government is a violent, repressive one, US intervention usually leads to even greater violence. Nineteen years after removing the Taliban government in Afghanistan, the United States has killed hundreds of thousands of Afghans.

Joe Biden talks about restoring American international leadership if he is elected, but that will be easier said than done. The American empire rose to international leadership by harnessing its economic and military power to a rules-based international order in the first half of the 20th century, culminating in the post-World War II rules of international law.

But the US has gradually deteriorated through the Cold War and post-Cold War triumphalism to a flailing, decadent empire that now threatens the world with a doctrine of “might makes right” and “my way or the highway.”

When Barack Obama was elected in

2008, much of the world still saw Bush, Cheney and the “War on Terror” as exceptional, rather than a new normal in American policy. Obama won the Nobel Peace Prize based on a few speeches and the world’s desperate hopes for a “peace president.” But eight years of Obama, Biden, Terror Tuesdays and Kill Lists followed by four years of Trump, Pence, children in cages and the New Cold War with China have confirmed the world’s worst fears that the dark side of American imperialism seen under Bush and Cheney was no aberration.

Amid America’s botched regime changes and lost wars, the most concrete evidence of its seemingly unshakeable commitment to aggression and militarism is that the US Military-Industrial Complex is still outspending the ten next largest military powers in the world combined, clearly out of all proportion to America’s legitimate defense needs.

So the concrete things we must do if we want peace are to stop bombing and sanctioning our neighbors and trying to overthrow their governments; to withdraw most American troops and close military bases around the world; and to

reduce our armed forces and our military budget to what we really need to defend our country, not to wage illegal wars of aggression half-way round the world.

For the sake of people around the world who are building mass movements to overthrow repressive regimes and struggling to construct new models of governing that are not replications of failed neoliberal regimes, we must stop our government—no matter who is in the White House—from trying to impose its will.

Bolivia’s triumph over US-backed regime change is an affirmation of the emerging people-power of our new multipolar world, and the struggle to move the US to a post-imperial future is in the interest of the American people as well. As the late Venezuelan leader Hugo Chávez once told a visiting US delegation, “If we work together with oppressed people inside the United States to overcome the empire, we will not only be liberating ourselves, but also the people of Martin Luther King.”

Source: *AntiWar.com*, October 29, 2020, edited for length.



*Task Force on the Americas delegation confronts Luis Almagro, then Uruguayan Exterior Minister, 2014. (Photo: Roger Harris.)*

### Calls for Resignation of OAS Secretary General

On Oct. 21 the 32-member Puebla Group called for the resignation of the Secretary General of the Organization of American States, Luis Almagro, after the resounding victory of the Movement to Socialism (MAS) in Bolivia.

The communiqué, which bears the signatures of leaders Dilma Rousseff, Ernesto Samper, Rafael Correa, José Luis Zapatero and Fernando Lugo [former heads of state of Brazil, Colom-

bia, Ecuador, Spain, and Paraguay], among others, says that these results confirm there was no election fraud in 2019, which is what studies by several international research centers had also shown.

A statement released by the Group said, “Evo Morales should have been in office as the President of Bolivia, if the OAS, in its condition of Observer, had not indicated that there had been fraud.” “The questioning by the OAS of Bolivia’s elections unleashed violence, which ended in a *coup d’état* and the

subsequent resignation of President Morales,” stated the Group, and the members demanded that the head of the OAS take responsibility for his actions.

The statement went on to say, “Given this evidence, it is clear that the leadership of the OAS Secretary General, Luis Almagro, is seriously questioned. The role he played in the destabilization of Bolivia disqualifies him from continuing as Secretary General. His departure will help the recovery of peace in the region.”

Source: *Radio La Primerísima*,



# Chile's Constitutional Referendum

“Neoliberalism was born in Chile and will die here”

*By Ariel Dorfman, Chilean-American author and Duke University professor emeritus. He lives in Chile and Durham, NC.*

It is not often that a country gets to decide its destiny in one momentous election. I am thinking, of course, of the United States. But I am also thinking of the referendum in Chile, where the people of that country decided by a landslide—78.27 percent of those who voted—to give themselves a new Constitution and thereby drastically redefine the way they wished to be governed.

Though a change in its founding document is not on the ballot in the United States, we should, here in America, pay close attention to what just happened in that distant land at the end of the earth. Heartened and inspired by the sight of ordinary people forcing a small ruling elite to accept, against all odds, the need for radical reforms, we would do well to learn some valuable lessons from that Chilean experience.

Sunday's [October 25] victory in Chile did not come easily or swiftly.

The Constitution that Chileans have just voted to supplant was installed by Gen. Augusto Pinochet in a fraudulent plebiscite in 1980, seven years after a lethal coup overthrew the democratically elected Socialist president, Salvador Allende.

Pinochet's *Ley Fundamental*—as it was called by those who drafted it—ostensibly established an itinerary for a transition to a restricted form of democracy, as there was to be another plebiscite in 1988 to ask citizens if they wished the general to remain in office for another eight (endlessly renewable) years.

In reality, that Constitution guaranteed that no matter who was in charge of the country, there would be no possibility of questioning the oppressive system that the dictator and his allies had built, particularly the neoliberal economic model of exploitation that had been imposed on workers with unprecedented violence.

And in effect, when Pinochet lost that 1988 plebiscite and was forced to retire as president (retaining control of the armed forces, of course), the Magna Carta he left behind acted as a straitjacket that for the next 30 years blocked all key efforts to create a more just and equitable society.

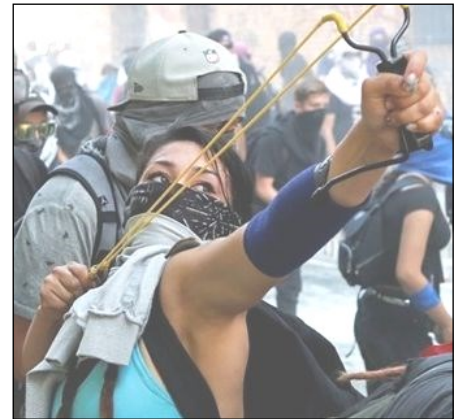
The center-left coalition that has governed Chile for most of that period was able to negotiate a number of amendments to Pinochet's fascist Constitution—and, significantly, lift a large section of the country's destitute population out of poverty—but none of those amendments altered the ability of a minority of right-wing legislators to undermine any attempt to alter the way in which wealth and power were distributed. And it was presumed that a populace traumatized by torture, executions, disappearances, exile, and incessant censorship and persecution would not dare to rebel against such an immoral situation.

And that is how things would still be today if a startling revolt had not exploded in mid-October of last year. Sparked initially by groups of students jumping subway turnstiles to protest a small hike in the fares, it soon grew into a nationwide uprising by millions of Chileans who threatened to bring down President Sebastián Piñera's conservative and unpopular government.

Though the demands were wide-ranging—for better salaries, health care, education, housing, environmental protection, clean water; for Indigenous, LGBTQ and women's rights; for reforms to the miserable pension plans and the untrammelled ferocity with which the police operated—the one issue that united all those who had taken over the streets was the urgent need to get rid of Pinochet's Constitution and its stranglehold on Chilean society.

Alarmed at what such an upheaval might unleash, right-wing leaders who had till then adamantly vetoed any changes to the status quo made up their mind to decompress the situation and avert a full-scale revolution by agreeing to hold a referendum in which voters would decide if they wanted a new Constitution, either choosing *Apruebo* (approval) or *Rechazo* (rejection).

Many of those hardcore Pinochetistas believed they would be able, as time went by, to derail that referendum. They used the pandemic to claim that it was too dangerous to carry out an election in those conditions (though they had no such qualms about opening malls!). And when that delaying tactic failed, they ran a vicious campaign of terror against “socialism,” warning that those in favor of a new Magna Carta were extremists intent on turning Chile into Venezuela.



“The unthinkable became possible because we went out and demanded it and the country did not crumble.” (Photo: Jorge Silva)

The people repudiated them. The right-wing proponents of the *Rechazo* option have garnered a scant 21.73 percent of the vote. It is true that several major figures on the right, sensing where the wind was blowing, came out in favor of a new Constitution, but the verdict is inescapable. The Pinochet era is finally over.

As a native of Chile, I had planned to fly to Santiago with my wife to participate in this historic event, but we were unable to do so because of the perils posed by Covid-19. I would have liked to witness the rebirth of a nation that seemed to have died when the coup destroyed our democracy all those decades ago.

I was 28 years old when Salvador Allende became president, and such a fervent enthusiast that three years later, when he was overthrown, I was working at La Moneda, the building where he died, and was saved from sharing his fate only by a chain of incredible circumstances. Along with so many who believed in Allende's dreams of a liberated Chile, I have spent most of my life since then hoping for a moment when those dreams of his would be echoed by future generations. That has now come to pass.

The road to justice has been opened and, by the middle of 2022, Chileans will be governed by a Constitution that embodies the wishes and needs of the vast majority.

Source: *The Nation*, October 26, 2020, edited for length.

## US Sanctions Cut Venezuela's Diesel Lifeline

By Paul Dobson, with *Venezuelanalysis*, lives in Mérida, Venezuela

Sanctions are expected to have a devastating impact on public transport, agriculture, water treatment and electricity generation.

US Special Envoy for Venezuela Elliott Abrams has announced a clamp-down on Venezuela's oil-for-diesel swap deals, tightening the blockade against the country.

"We are trying to stop the export of crude by the Maduro regime in Venezuela, and one of the ways to stop it is to prevent people from swapping various products for it," Abrams told reporters.

Oil-for-diesel swap deals, in which Caracas exchanges imported diesel for crude oil, were exempted from Washington's 2019 oil embargo against Venezuela and have been increasingly used to avoid the plethora of financial sanctions which limit Venezuela's access to global payment and banking systems.

The tightening of the embargo has, however, been expected in the run up to the US presidential election, with many of the sanction exemption permits due to expire in October and November.

Caracas has become increasingly reliant on fuel imports as it struggles to recuperate domestic refining capacity. According to state-run [oil company] PDVSA, Venezuela imported 1.6 million barrels of diesel in swap deals from Italy's Eni, Spain's Repsol and India's Reliance in the first eight months of the year, with another 260,000 barrels estimated in September.

These companies have been granted special permits to continue their Venezuela operations in recent months, with Venezuelan diesel consumers remaining largely unaffected by the extensive fuel shortages sweeping the country. Nevertheless, in recent months Washington threatened the multinational corporations into ceasing their Venezuela dealings.

A group of NGOs, including several linked to Venezuela's opposition, petitioned the White House in September to abandon its plans to end the swap deal exemption, arguing that it would cause "devastating consequences for the population."

"Diesel is the principal fuel for electrical generation and heavy load

transport of basic goods, including food, medicine and humanitarian supplies. To cut off the supply of diesel in the country would worsen the already precarious conditions for millions of Venezuelans ... Without diesel, there may be a paralyzation of heavy load transport which would affect the indispensable survival supplies for millions of Venezuelan families," the NGOs' petition read. The group also pointed to Venezuela's reliance on diesel for water pumping and treatment plants as well as agricultural machinery and irrigation systems.

One of the NGOs, the center-right Washington Office for Latin America (WOLA) think tank, which has previously backed US unilateral coercive



*"Like old-time piracy, the US seizes Venezuelan oil and sells it."*  
(teleSUR, October 30, 2020)

measures, also published a report damning the US sanctions regime, which apart from the 2019 oil embargo includes a wide-reaching general embargo, a range of financial measures and secondary sanctions against foreign firms trading with Caracas. According to WOLA, the sanctions regime has not achieved the short-time regime change it sought and has increasingly affected the Venezuelan population.

The report states that the sanctions have "directly contributed to [the country's] deep decline, and to the further deterioration of the quality of life of

Venezuelans." It also concludes that "US sanctions have caused the Venezuelan state to lose between \$17 billion to \$31 billion in revenue," as well as that "the value of average monthly public imports dropped by 46 percent (to \$500 million) in 2019 and another 50 percent (to \$250 million) in 2020."

Finally, the report claimed that financial sanctions have seen "human rights groups, humanitarian organizations, and private companies have their bank accounts closed, and seen legitimate transactions denied or frozen for long periods of time."

In addition to the crackdown on oil-for-diesel swap deals, Abrams also reported that the 1.12 million barrels of Venezuela-bound fuel which were seized in international waters by the US in August have been sold.

According to the special envoy, the four cargoes of Iranian fuel fetched more than US \$40 million in a special auction, with the funds due to be deposited into a US government fund allegedly for "victims of state sponsored terrorism." No further details were offered.

Washington breached new ground in its blockade against Venezuela by confiscating four fuel cargoes in open sea in the Caribbean under a Department of Justice court order.

At the time, the Maduro government blasted US actions as an act of "piracy," claiming the seizure to be just the latest in a number of international measures to deny Caracas access to its foreign-based assets and purchased goods, such as the US \$1.8 billion of gold held in the Bank of England and Venezuela's US-based CITGO oil subsidiary, which was valued at US \$7 billion at the time of its seizure.

While many of these assets remain frozen, US authorities have placed some of them under the control of Venezuelan opposition sectors, including US \$342 million transferred from a Venezuelan Central Bank account in Citibank to a US Federal Reserve account in April.

In addition to previous claims from opposition leader Juan Guaidó promising to use US-based financing sources to fund local loyalists, recent revelations in Venezuela have also connected his hard-right Popular Will party (VP) to misappropriation of funds from the CITGO seizure.

Source: *Venezuelanalysis* November 2, 2020, edited for length.



# UN Report on Venezuela Omits the Greatest Violation of Human Rights: US Aggression

By *Leonardo Flores, Latin America campaign coordinator for CodePink*

On September 23, María Eugenia Russián, president of Fundalatin, Venezuela’s oldest human rights organization, testified to the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) and decried an attempt by a UNHRC fact-finding mission to erase people who were “lynched, burned alive, decapitated and murdered by extremist sectors of the Venezuelan opposition.” This fact-finding mission had published a report a week earlier that generated sensationalist headlines of “crimes against humanity” and painted a bleak picture of the situation in Venezuela.

However, the 400+ page report has been found to contain serious flaws and omissions, leading to charges that it politicizes human rights—a position backed by the Venezuelan government.

**Parallel mission:** Moreover, even the formation of the fact-finding mission is suspect. Since 2017, Venezuela has been working with a different UN institution, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), to strengthen its capacity to guarantee human rights.

Yet despite—or perhaps because of—this cooperation, the Lima Group, an ad hoc group of nations dedicated to regime change in Venezuela, maneuvered within the UN Human Rights Council to establish a parallel mission outside of the purview of the OHCHR.

In the September 2019 debate prior to the founding of this mission, Russián made a prescient comment: “[the mission] will generate major headlines but will not contribute to resolving the situation.”

**Flawed methodology:** The first thing to note about the report is that the authors are all from countries that support Guaidó.

Venezuelan human rights organization Sures considers that the report “lacks academic rigor” as the mission did not set foot in Venezuela “and as such never had

direct access to the sources it consulted, including the victims, government officials and official records.”

Lending credence to the claim of a lack of rigor is the fact that more than 50% of the report’s sources were links to social and digital media, while just 5% were NGOs.

Misión Verdad, an independent group of Venezuelan investigative journalists and analysts, wrote an exposé of the sources used in the report and found that one of these NGOs, COFAVIC (Committee of Relatives of Victims of the Caracazo), receives USAID funds and has ties to Human Rights Watch, which supports regime change and the brutal US sanctions.

None of the NGOs the fact-finding mission contacted even mentioned the case of Orlando Figuera, a young black man burned alive by anti-government protestors, which has arguably been the most infamous violation of human rights in Venezuela in recent years.

If the report were interested in balance, it would have cited or contacted Venezuelan human rights groups that document right-wing violence at protests and the devastating effects of US sanctions.

While victims like Figuera are ignored, another detailed critique by Misión Verdad documents the repeated “whitewashing” of political actors linked to violence by presenting them as victims.

As tragic as it is that a UN mission would engage in the erasure of victims of human rights violations perpetrated by government opponents, these are not even the most glaring omissions in the report. There are two ongoing mass violations of the human rights of all Venezuelans: the violent destabilization of the country by foreign and domestic actors, and the brutal US sanctions.

**Context of a hybrid war:** Beyond the bias and politicization of the report, what perhaps damns it most is how it is being used. The omissions on the impact of coups and sanctions enable regime change operatives such as Elliott Abrams, US special representative for Iran and Venezuela, to cite the report as evidence of crimes against humanity while, in the same breath, threatening to cut off Venezuela’s diesel supplies, which has drawn widespread condemna-

tion from NGOs across the political spectrum for the devastating effect it would have on the Venezuelan people.

The report was similarly used by Senators Marco Rubio and Ben Cardin, who referenced it in a letter to the European Union in which they expressed “deep concern” over EU talks with the Maduro government and urged the EU to not monitor Venezuela’s parliamentary elections. This blatant attempt at interfering in and attempting to delegitimize Venezuela’s elections went uncovered by mainstream media, which focused all of their attention on the UNHCR report.

The fact-finding mission has produced a document that is currently being employed in the furtherance of sanctions, electoral interference and threats of war. To put it another way, the UNHCR report on the human rights of Venezuelans will likely lead to even more suffering for Venezuelans.

In the words of Fundalatin President Russián, the threat to the human rights of Venezuelans “becomes graver because of the behavior by powerful states, who in the name of human rights, seek a foreign military intervention in Venezuela.”

Source: *CodePink, October 2, 2020, edited for length.*



“Sanctions kill” (Photo: Roger Harris)

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# COLOMBIA: US Exports Policing Model

By Maya Hernández, *Nation Coordinator, Alliance for Global Justice*

"A cop is a cop," said James Baldwin in 1971, undoubtedly pointing to the way that US law enforcement operates as a fraternized collective, wherein embedded systemic policies promote the use of violence. Slave Patrols, created in the South in 1704, were the first form of policing in the US. One of the primary functions of the Slave Patrols was to deter slaves from revolting by employing organized terror.

In the 1830s, the push for a centralized police force that dealt with growing urbanization, primarily a result of incoming immigrant wage workers, became a critical priority for wealthy elites who feared for their business and mercantile interests. In the late 19th century, major strikes and riots ensued in cities like Chicago, wherein protestors were met with attacks and extreme violence at the hand of police. After those strikes, the institution began to position itself as the protector of civilization and of security from the increasing social divide. In the South, the official system of discrimination known as "Jim Crow" used the police to conduct mass arrests of black people, driving them into convict systems as a way of reinstating the free labor that had been lost through the ending of slavery.

Today, police who murder black people in the streets are rarely convicted or fired for their crimes. One out of a handful of recent police killings was the murder of Breonna Taylor. Following unfounded claims, the police broke down Taylor's front door and fatally shot her.

A significant element of policing in the United States is the exportation of those models to the rest of the world with the purpose of gaining geopolitical power and control, successfully creating a transnational repressive police force. Today, the US trains police in 91 different countries, internationalizing the tar-



geting of people of color by focusing their efforts in non-White majority countries. According to a recent article published in the Washington Post, "US funding for foreign police training expanded from \$4.3 million in 2001 to \$146 million in 2018." This is to protect the profits secured from the global plunder of transnational corporations and their regional collaborators.

Colombia is one of the first countries to use the US policing model. In 1999, the Colombian government, backed by President Bill Clinton, created ESMAD or Mobile Anti-Disturbance Squadron as part of a military-assistance program called Plan Colombia. Plan Colombia was a US foreign-aid initiative to combat left-wing insurgent groups and drug cartels in Colombia by increasing aggressive and militant policing methods. In rural areas, ESMAD has been used against protests led by peasant farmers, indigenous consultations known as *mingas*, and against communities protesting to be included in voluntary programs of rural development to create alternatives to coca production. Disproportionately, the targets have been indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities. We also saw the brutal targeting by ESMAD of the civic strike in Buenaventura, a city that is over 80% Afro-Colombian and that has suffered some of the highest rates of the nation's institutional poverty and urban paramilitary

activities that ensue with impunity and little to no police intervention.

In early September of this year, outrage and unrest spread throughout Bogotá with the killing of an unarmed lawyer, Javier Ordóñez. Ordóñez was stopped with the sole reason being that he had violated a curfew put in place as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic. In the massive protests that followed, ESMAD took to the streets and killed an additional 13 people.

In collaboration with the US and independently, Colombia operates its own international training programs. Between 2009 and 2017, Colombia trained over 30,000 students, including military, police, court, and prison officials. Half of those trained are from Mexico, with Honduras, Guatemala, and Panama as key recipients as well.

Despite the documented murders and severe brutality committed by ESMAD, the initiative has continued to grow, from 200 agents at its inception in 1999 to a little over 3,300 today. The more violence that ESMAD imparts, the more people protest in response. ESMAD has not been apprehended for their violations because their efforts are in direct service of the government: to silence protestors and general social unrest. Presently, Colombians protest for the dissolution of ESMAD.

Source: *Alliance for Global Justice, November 10, 2020, edited for length.*

## Asylum Priorities for Next US Presidential Term

Ed. Note: *As this newsletter has consistently shown, US interference in the affairs of other countries is a main contributor to the conditions that make it necessary for people to flee their homelands.*

To provide protection from persecution and torture, the Center for Gender and Refugee Studies recommends the

following six specific non-partisan priority actions to rebuild the US asylum system in the next presidential term.

The United States should:

- Honor its treaty obligations
- Ensure that all asylum seekers are treated humanely and with respect and can live in safety and dignity while their applications are under consideration
- Provide a fair and efficient system for determining claims to asylum

- Respect family unity and the best interests of the child
- Restore the refugee resettlement program and build other pathways to protection
- Resume its role as a global leader in refugee protection

(For more detail, search in your browser: [cgrs/asylum priorities – next term](#))

Source: *UC Hastings Center for Gender and Refugee Rights, November 2020.*



## MEXICO: US Capital Brings High Rates of Chronic Disease

By Belén Fernández, *journalist*

In August, the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca banned the sale of junk food and sugary drinks to children under the age of 18. Mexico’s Assistant Health Secretary Hugo Lopez-Gatell, who has denounced soda as “bottled poison,” expressed support for the new law, which has begun to catch on in other Mexican states as well.

In recent years, Mexico has vied with the US for the title of most obese nation on earth—three-fourths of adults there are overweight, and at least one in 10 have diabetes. Oaxaca, one of the poorest Mexican states, has among the highest obesity levels and the highest child obesity rate in the country.

Indeed, Mexicans drink more soda per capita than any other country in the world, and former Mexican President Vicente Fox was once the CEO of Coca-Cola Mexico. In 2017, diabetes became the nation’s number one killer.

How, then, did Mexico end up in such a deadly position? To answer this question, a good place to start is the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between the US, Canada, and Mexico, which came into effect in 1994 and was recently repackaged as something-way-better-than-NAFTA under the auspices of resident continental megalomaniac Donald Trump.

Behind the ever-convenient facade of “free trade”—which in contexts involving the US generally means the US is free to do as it pleases while the rest of

the participating countries are free to suck it up—NAFTA enabled the US to flood the Mexican market with sugary drinks, processed foods, and other staples of noxious, corporate-driven existence.

American fast-food chains and convenience stores rapidly proliferated, and, as the *New York Times* noted, Walmart was the country’s largest food retailer as of 2017. This in a country whose traditional cuisine appears on UNESCO’s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

“Food,” of course, is another term that should be used loosely when referring to products largely devoid of nutritional value that are, in fact, addictive and hazardous to human health.

To be sure, one of NAFTA’s crowning achievements was the exposure of sectors of the Mexican economy to conquest by US capital, as with the dismantling of restrictions on foreign majority ownership in Mexican businesses.

A 2016 paper in the *Washington University Journal of Law & Policy* argues that NAFTA-facilitated foreign direct investment by the US in Mexico has been the “most direct contributor to the spread of non-communicable diseases” like obesity in that country.

Direct US investment in Mexican food and beverage firms soared by the billions on account of the 1994 deal, exerting additional toxic influence on Mexican consumer choices, which do not really qualify as “choices” when, for example, Coca-Cola is just as cheap and often more readily available than water.

The paper, which also discusses global trends of “McDonaldization” and “Coca-Colanization,” cites the calculation that post-NAFTA US exports to Mexico of high-fructose corn syrup (a high-calorie sweetener used in sodas and other products and linked to obesity) were thus far “up by a factor of 863.”

NAFTA furthermore provided imperial entities with a legal apparatus to adjudicate on behalf of hypocrisy, as when US agribusiness company Cargill Inc successfully sued the Mexican government after Mexico attempted to tax the production and sale of high-fructose corn syrup-enriched soft drinks.

The US, for its part, was permitted to blissfully subsidize overproduction in its own corn industry—not to mention its meat industry, soy industry, and so on—leading, less than shockingly, to an export-based devastation of domestic Mexican production. So much for “free trade.”

In the end, anyway, the function of US-led neoliberal globalization is to destroy not only cuisines and cultures but also lives and livelihoods. By unleashing its industrialized agricultural system against Mexico, the US drove to ruin and displacement millions of Mexican farmers, who were unable to compete in the hostile environment.

Many had to migrate to cities, where they increasingly subsisted on processed food rather than pursuing a traditional local diet, both due to economic constraints and the fact that—surprise, surprise—much of the good stuff was being exported to the US, which in the wake of NAFTA found itself on the receiving end of a year-long influx of fresh fruits and vegetables grown in the warmer climes of the southern neighbor.

Loads of Mexicans have also been compelled to travel north to the US itself in search of financial salvation, often as “illegal” laborers, since avocados happen to have more rights than certain categories of humans in terms of crossing the US-Mexico border.

One of the reasons the US junk food industry has so aggressively targeted Mexico is because—while US companies certainly are not going hungry on the domestic scene—US restrictions on food advertisements for children means that “corporations look around the world to see where the legal framework still allows them to market to children, and they double down.”

This last quote is from Alyshia Gálvez, author of *Eating NAFTA: Trade, Food Policies, and the Destruction of Mexico*, who also emphasizes that, in Mexico, historically, “you simply do not see diabetes” among people who consume the traditional milpa-based diet. Rather, diabetes is a “product of an industrialized diet.” To be sure, the incidence of diabetes in Mexico shot up after the passage of NAFTA and, as with coronavirus, the disease disproportionately afflicts the poor.

Source: *Al Jazeera*, September 19, 2020, edited for length.

(Image: ventriloquismnyc)



# HONDURAS & NICARAGUA: Hurricane Eta Hits the Mosquito Coast

By John Perry, Masaya, Nicaragua

Editor's Note: *Two weeks after Eta, the even more devastating Hurricane Iota hit the region.*

Central America's "Mosquito Coast," the home of the Miskito people, stretches between Honduras and Nicaragua. The border is at a point that juts out into the Caribbean: Columbus called it Cabo Gracias a Dios for the shelter it provided on his last voyage.

As the storm that became Hurricane Eta formed above the seas of Venezuela on 30 October, it headed west towards the cape 2000 kilometers away, following the track of Hurricane Edith in 1971, Mitch in 1998 (which killed seven thousand people in Honduras and three thousand in Nicaragua), Felix in 2007, Ida in 2009, and many other lesser cyclones.

Eta swung south as it approached, devastating coastal settlements and then, at hurricane force 4, turned inland to Nicaragua on 3 November, destroying the Miskito village at Wawa Bar. At the nearby port of Bilwí, 77 houses collapsed and 803 were damaged. As the winds weakened, heavy rains began and ten rivers broke their banks.

A day later, heading north-west, Eta crossed into Honduras. It hit Cuba on the weekend and made landfall in Florida on Sunday evening.

Nicaraguan authorities had five days' notice of Eta's arrival; Honduras had six. Nicaragua's disaster agency announced its plans on 30 October, and the next day lorries were carrying roofing materials, mattresses, and food to Bilwí. Thirty thousand people were evacuated and moved into stronger buildings such as churches and schools. Two people died: artisan gold miners working despite the warnings, buried by a mudslide.

In Honduras, where the COVID-19 epidemic is still at full strength, 4 November was to be the start of a traditional holiday that the government hoped would lift the public mood. Faced with warnings of up to 60 cm of rain, they focused on whether or not to let the holiday go ahead, rather than preparing for the emergency. By the time the festivities were cancelled on 2 November, coastal settlements were already flooded.

On 3 November, the valley that holds Honduras's second city, San Pedro

Sula, began to flood. NGOs warned that a "catastrophe" was happening and people should save themselves. A red alert was issued only when 400,000 people had fled their homes, collected on the roofs of buildings, and began sharing video clips of the water lapping at their feet.

One man, Julio Guerrero, appealing for help on Facebook, blamed the government for his imminent drowning and that of "thousands of Hondurans." He was eventually rescued along with many who had spent as much as 30 hours stranded in heavy rain.

By 7 November, the official death toll had reached 25 but one morgue was said to be preparing to receive 100 bodies; more than 1.7 million people's homes were lost or damaged; twenty road bridges were destroyed, one swept away dramatically by rising waters, and 51 major roads are unusable.

Recriminations began. The minister responsible for dealing with disasters, whose nickname is "Killa," blamed the victims for not leaving their homes quickly enough. Journalists who had criticized the government for encouraging people to travel during the holiday week, despite the pandemic, attacked it for prevaricating while the disaster unfurled.

Well-known presenters from Televicentro and Une TV made stinging comparisons between Honduras's inaction and Nicaragua's early preparations. When officials blamed the pandemic for depleting the public coffers, journalists blamed the corruption that has siphoned off much of the international aid sent to Honduras to deal with it.

Honduras was in crisis before it was hit by Eta. The president is running a narco-state, having fraudulently gained re-election in 2017. Since the murder of Berta Cáceres in 2016, there has been no respite in attacks on human rights defenders: in the midst of the pandemic, five members of an indigenous coastal community fighting against tourism developments were kidnapped and have yet to reappear.

Well before COVID-19 arrived, the health service had been stripped of funding, some of it redirected to fund the ruling party's election campaigns.

Both Juan Orlando Hernández in Honduras and Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua took calculated risks when the pan-

demic began in March. Ortega relied on his investment in 19 new hospitals and—above all—a community-based health system to ride the crisis without imposing a lockdown.

Hernández knew his health service wouldn't cope and enforced a strict lockdown with regular police violence. Nicaragua has officially registered 5600 virus cases in a population of 6.6 million (opposition sources claim the real total is 10,900). Honduras reached 100,000 cases this weekend in a population of 10 million. After the deluge, the virus is likely to proliferate.

Source: *London Review of Books*, November 9, 2020.

### Special appeal

*Solidarity groups are raising emergency funds through the existing Nicaragua Solidarity Fund "Padre Miguel D'Escoto Brockmann." Please make a tax-deductible contribution at <https://bit.ly/nicaraguasolidarityfund>.*



*Nicaraguan police officer rescues child after Hurricane Eta hit. (Photo: Sky News)*





Cattle with ear tags in tropical rainforest. (Photo: Roger Harris)

### NICARAGUA: Conflict Beef?

*By Becca Mohally Renk, with Casa Benjamin Linder in Managua. She has lived in Nicaragua for 20 years*

One of my first deeds as a social activist was when I was 11: I wrote a letter to the CEO of McDonald's. In careful penmanship, I demanded that the company stop supplying its franchise with beef produced on land in the Amazon rainforest that had been clear cut to make way for cattle farming.

My efforts were eventually rewarded with a form letter response and two Happy Meal coupons. This kindled in me a moral outrage that has never quite died out.

So you can imagine it caught my attention last week when a similar story about Nicaraguan beef hit the news cycle in the US. PBS Newshour aired a report claiming beef imported from Nicaragua—now the third-largest supplier of frozen beef to the US—comes “at a high human cost.”

A *Reveal News* article broke the story, claiming that the Nicaraguan beef industry has ramped up exports to meet demand from US markets, fueled by COVID shut-downs at US packing plants. In order to do this, the story alleges, Nicaraguan cattle farmers are encroaching on indigenous land in the North Caribbean Autonomous Region (RACCN), cutting down forests and killing indigenous people, including children.

What is behind these claims?

The region mentioned in the *Reveal News* article is in the Bosawás biosphere reserve in the RACCN, the largest area of tropical rainforest north of the Amazon. Its small communities have few roads and are connected instead by river transport. Many of the locals belong to indigenous groups who have been granted land titles by the government, while others are settlers (called *colonos*) who lease land or occupy it illegally.

These settlers have migrated east. They are displaced peasant farmers who cannot afford to buy or rent land in populated areas so seek to buy it cheaply or illegally—or to simply occupy land. Sparsely populated areas like Bosawás are

especially vulnerable.

The conflicts in indigenous communities have existed for decades and are often complex—disputes between established farmers and landless peasants, internal disputes in indigenous communities over control of their communal lands. Some leaders have been accused of selling land to groups of outside settlers.

In recent years the [Sandinista] Nicaraguan government has legally deeded 31% of the national territory to 314 indigenous communities in non-transferrable titles, helping to curb illegal land sales and deforestation. The authorities that administer these lands are designated by the communities themselves.

The area in question is vast and remote. Although the Nicaraguan Army has a special battalion to protect the forests, the central government has few resources to patrol the extension of the agricultural frontier or defend land rights in remote areas.

While it cannot be denied that some of the settler farmers involved in these disputes do have cattle, the main Nicaraguan cattle industry is based in Chontales, in the central region. The region the *Reveal News* story focuses on, the RACCN, has about a quarter of the country's land area but it has only 7% of the total population and 10% of Nicaragua's cattle industry.

For its story, *Reveal News* quotes a USDA spokesperson as saying there is no recognized system to trace beef within Nicaragua, but the USDA should know that's simply not true, since the only four packing plants certified for export in Nicaragua are all inspected and certified by the USDA as well as the Nicaraguan Institute for Agricultural Safety and Health (IPSA), both of which require strict traceability of product.

In order to transport cattle or take

them to auction, each animal must have paperwork and an accompanying ear tag—now commonly used around the country at a cost of \$2 to the farmer. Both IPSA and the Federation of Livestock Associations of Nicaragua responded to the PBS story, and the Federation stated that it has signed agreements with the indigenous groups to protect the reserves.

Given the remoteness of the indigenous areas and difficulty of access, even if some cattle from disputed lands were to be allowed to enter the supply chain for export, they would represent only a tiny proportion of the total.

But why the focus on Nicaragua and not, for example, Brazil, where the government's complicity in deforesting the Amazon for cattle farming is well-documented? The answer may lie in the source of the material for this story, the Oakland Institute.

In the past two years, this “progressive think tank” has begun regularly publishing reports openly hostile to Nicaragua. In 2018 a major funder for the Oakland Institute, the Howard G. Buffett Foundation, granted the Institute more than \$235,000 for “Land Disputes in Nicaragua,” and in 2019 the Oakland Institute's budget increased by more than 100% over 2018, coinciding with an uptick in its anti-Nicaragua campaign.

The Howard G. Buffett Foundation is the largest funder of armed vigilante groups along the Arizona-Mexican border. [Based on public tax returns.]

While disputes over indigenous land and deforestation are important issues in Nicaragua that urgently need to be resolved, there is no evidence that beef for export to the US is fueling violent conflict. Rather, this story is a politicized attempt to conflate hot-button issues to damage Nicaragua.

Unfortunately, a beef boycott action by those believing they are protecting Nicaraguans would not help indigenous groups protect their land or prevent conflict—it would instead make Nicaraguans suffer.

If those behind these “conflict beef” allegations and their allies in the US beef industry manage to ban Nicaraguan beef from US markets, the 140,000 cattle ranching families and the 600,000 Nicaraguans who work full time in the cattle industry are the ones who will suffer.

Source: *Casa Ben Linder, October 29, 2020, edited for length.*

# HAITI: US and UN Support the Criminal Regime

*By Robert Roth, Haiti Action Committee*

The human rights crisis under the US-backed dictatorship of Jovenel Moïse has continued to widen and deepen with the proliferation of “Tonton Macoutes” style death squad repression across the country.

On October 2nd, 2020, university student leader, law student, and teacher-in-training Gregory Saint-Hilaire was shot in the back inside of the university by Jovenel Moïse’s special security unit within the Haitian police that had illegally invaded the campus.

Saint-Hilaire was an outspoken pro-democracy activist who had been calling upon students and faculty to denounce government corruption, massacres, and Haiti’s rapid descent into dictatorship. After being shot, Saint-Hilaire was prevented from receiving medical care for four hours or more and died. The next day, university students accused the Haitian police of involvement in setting the school library on fire.

Gregory Saint-Hilaire’s murder came on the heels of the assassination of Monferrier Dorval, a well respected Haitian lawyer, constitutional scholar, and head of the Port-au-Prince bar association, who was killed on August 28th, 2020, literally within hours of speaking out against the regime in a radio broadcast.

As noted by US Representative Maxine Waters, in a powerful letter of protest directed to US Ambassador Michele Sison on October 5th, 2020, “Dorval had previously signed a statement denouncing more than two dozen presidential decrees signed by Moïse and calling for them to be recalled. Dorval’s murder followed the murder of at least two other prominent Haitians, Radio Caraïbes host Frantz Adrien Bony and Haitian businessman Michel Saïeh; all three were killed over a two-day period.”

Meanwhile, massacres, extrajudicial killings, and the burning of houses by the regime’s surrogate “G-9” death squad in popular, impoverished Port-au-Prince neighborhoods such as Cité Soleil, Lasalin, Tokyo, and Bel Air have become regular occurrences.

G-9 refers to a highly armed network of paramilitary affiliates of the regime (labeled “gangs” in the media) led by former police officer Jimmy Cher-

izier, aka “Barbecue.” Even children and pregnant women have not been spared by the G-9 during these massacres.

In Cité Soleil, on July 12th, 2020, Merijouna Fleurimont, an eight-month old baby, was shot in the head and killed by the G-9 death squad in the course of its assault on the community.

Two weeks later, also in Cité Soleil, 27-year old Gyrlande Polis, eight months pregnant, was shot and killed by the G-9 death squad. Due to the lack of healthcare, her unborn baby also died.

As with the notorious Lasalin massacre on November 13th, 2018—perpetrated by G-9 leader Cherizier along with paramilitary affiliates and police officers of the regime—these more recent massacres are targeting unarmed civilians in popular neighborhoods that are bases of Lavalas opposition to the regime. Lavalas is the mass movement for democracy and human rights in Haiti led by the poor majority.



*Christella, killed by a G-9 death squad member after she resisted being raped.*

Working-class women in popular neighborhoods are subjected to rape by regime forces as part of their war on the Haitian poor.

One example among countless such crimes was the murder of Christella [last name withheld due to security concerns] on August 24th, 2020 in Lasalin. She

resisted rape by a G9 death squad member, and he shot her in the head in front of her child. This provoked outrage in the Haitian popular movement and social media, but received no coverage whatsoever here in the US media.

While the regime has escalated its repression and killings, the US government has increased its level of funding for and provision of weapons to the regime’s US-trained police. Since Trump took office, the US has nearly quadrupled its support to Haiti—from \$2.8 million in 2016 to more than \$12.4 million last year. With the recent reallocation, the figure this year will likely be even higher. US funding for the Haitian police constitutes more than 10 percent of the institution’s overall budget.

The US government continues to provide key support for the regime, propping up its power despite massive, unyielding protests by the Haitian people.

The US government continues to support the regime’s plan to hold illegitimate elections and maintain its death grip, despite the fact that truly fair and free elections are impossible under such a regime.

Likewise, the UN continues to provide critical international support for the regime that is a malignant outgrowth of the US/ UN occupation of Haiti following the US-backed coup d’état against President Aristide on February 29th, 2004.

In an appalling statement, the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres credited “the strengthening of G9 control in parts of the [Port-au-Prince] metropolitan area” with an alleged reduction in intentional homicides of 12% between June 1 and August 31. Undoubtedly, the alleged reduction in “intentional homicides” does not include the victims of G-9 massacres like Gyrlande Polis.

The Haitian people are engaged in a life-and-death struggle for genuine human rights and national liberation. Now, more than ever, our solidarity is needed. Source: *Haiti Action Committee, October 6, 2020, edited for length.*

**Take urgent action:** Demand that the UN stop supporting the G-9 death squad and the dictatorship of Jovenel Moïse! For more information: [www.haitisolidarity.net](http://www.haitisolidarity.net).



# CUBA: US Blockade Causes Grief and Monetary Loss

By *W. T. Whitney, retired pediatrician*

Cuba's Foreign Ministry every year prepares a report on Cuba's experience with the US economic blockade of the island, in force since 1962. The Report is supposed to inform the General Assembly delegates and the public as to the nature of the blockade and its impact on Cuba and the Cuban people. The blockade is the principal tool the United States uses to undermine Cuba's government.

A State Department official, in 1960, expressed [the] counter-revolutionary purpose: a blockade sought "a line of action which...makes the greatest inroads in denying money and supplies to Cuba, to decrease monetary and real wages, to bring about hunger, desperation and overthrow of government."

The authors of the Report condemn the blockade as cruel and as illegal under international law. They speak of genocide, Cuban sovereignty endangered, and Cuba's economic and social development under assault.

According to the Report, the Treasury Department's Office for Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) levied penalties against dozens of US and third-country entities. In October, 2019 the US government applied that rule also to goods exported to Cuba by a country that had imported them from another country.

In September, 2019, OFAC sharply limited the dollar amount of remittances Cuban Americans may send to families on the island. Remittances constitute one of Cuba's major sources of foreign currency.

The Report devotes much attention to the plethora of fines levied against foreign banks and other financial institutions after they handled transactions involving Cuba and the US dollar. It cites dozens of individual examples. Intimidation is now so widespread as to have persuaded many such institutions to

avoid dealing with Cuba altogether.

The document highlights US implementation of Title III of the Helms-Burton Law that, beginning in May 2019, has led to law suits against foreign businesses brought before US courts on behalf of former owners of nationalized property in Cuba. They are seeking damages. The resulting anxiety among foreign investors has led to "cancellation of commercial operations, cooperation actions and foreign investment projects."

Detailing specific examples, the Report condemns US penalties imposed on ships, companies and individuals involved in shipping oil to Cuba. The Report's authors regard that new phase of the blockade as "a qualitative leap in the intensification and implementation of non-conventional measures in times of peace."

Additionally, the US government has threatened thousands of Cuban doctors working abroad in various ways. Many of the doctors working abroad generate income for the government. The Report records the prohibition on cruise ships arriving in Cuba.

The fallout is considerable, especially for the healthcare sector. Dozens of US companies, on being asked, refused to sell medical equipment and drugs to Cuban importers. When purchased through a third-country agent, they are more expensive. And supplies and medications manufactured in third countries may not be readily available on account of the ten-percent rule.

Cuba's fight against COVID-19 took one hit when blockade regulations prevented the unloading in Cuba of a Chinese shipment of donated anti-pandemic supplies, and another one when Swiss manufacturers refused to sell ventilators to Cuba. Cuban food imports are expensive in part because of extra expenses involved with the purchase of US food products, allowed through congressional

action in 2000. Blockade-related fuel shortages hamper agricultural production by interfering with planting, transportation, and storage.

The blockade has hit education, sports and cultural development in Cuba. Supplies and fuel are frequently in short supply and transportation and travel are often unavailable. US restrictions interfere with Cuba's export of drugs, vaccines, and diagnostic tests.

The Report indicates that during the 12-month survey period, Cuba's tourist industry lost \$1.9 billion. Losses stemmed from new US travel restrictions and from prohibitions on tourist services, particularly hotels. OFAC has now prohibited US airlines, or airlines with US connections, from flying into Cuba, except to the Jose Marti Airport in Havana.

According to this Report, the workings of the US blockade deprived Cuba of \$5,570,300,000 between April 2019 and March 2020—some \$1.2 billion more than during the previous year. Among estimates figured into the amount are expenses incurred in buying materials at inflated prices in distant places, losses from foreign sales that never happened, and revenues the crippled tourist industry might have generated. The human cost in lives lost or blunted is not part of the calculation.

Cuba has lost \$144.4 billion over the course of almost six decades. Dollar depreciation over the period puts the total up to \$1.098 trillion. Why, one asks, does the blockade continue?

The anti-Cuban blockade is a substitute for military action. US strategists evidently perceived that military intervention or provocation of an internal coup wouldn't work to ensure counter-revolution in Cuba.

Source: *CounterPunch*, November 2, 2020, edited for length.

*Havana street art (Photo: Roger Harris)*



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## SOUTH AMERICA

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# BOLIVIA: The People Have Won

By Manuel Monroy Chazarreta, Bolivian musician and writer

On October 18, 2020 the poorest people, the worker, the day laborer, have won the elections in Bolivia.

She has won: the shopkeeper who sells chamomile and eucalyptus, who now knows the bus fare will not go up, because the gas and fuel belong to the Bolivians and not to the transnationals. They have lost: the ones who yearn for Miami and look down on Bolivia.

He has won: the electrical worker who now knows that electricity belongs to the Bolivians. They have lost: the one who dreams of a white Bolivia; the one who kicks the indigenous women in *polleras* (traditional skirts); the fascist motorcycle rider who beats up the indigenous people, while his grandfather is indigenous.

He has won: the taxi driver, because of the conversion of his car from gasoline to diesel, which the government made free in 2013, and his son will be able to stay in school thanks to the Juancito Pinto Bond.

They have won: the frontline nurse and the hospital technician who risk their lives in the fight against COVID. He has lost: the doctor who, in the pandemic, came up with respirators

that didn't work, and went away with dirty money in his pocket. They have won: the memory of Juana Azurduy and the anticolonial *guerrilleros*; the multicolored children, brought out of poverty by 14 years of a revolution, who then graduated from high school and now enter free universities. They have lost: the *latifundistas*; the slave owners.

It has won: the village that now has internet via the Túpac



Katari satellite. They have lost: the little prick in the opposition who now wants to leave a country with so many Indians; the one who buys tear gas when we need vaccines; the fascist who massacred us at Senkata and the Huayllani Bridge. She has won: the widow of the poor martyr; his memory will be honored by the popular new government. We've won the lithium for the Bolivians. *Abya Yala* (indigenous term for the Americas) with the *wiphala*

(flag of the Andean indigenous) has won.

We know how to win. We know how to lose. We know how to cry. We know how to laugh. Simón (Bolívar) and his dream of Latin American unity have won. Justice has won. For Bolivia, Great Motherland!

Source: *La Razón*, October 28, 2020, edited for length. (Photo: Reuters/Marco Bello)

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