

# Sanctions as Warfare and Collective Punishment of Civilians

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- Broad economic sanctions are a form of warfare
- They mainly target the civilian population
- Francisco Rodríguez: “The estimated effects are similar to those seen in armed conflicts”



# McGovern: An “indiscriminate” weapon

**Congressman Jim McGovern**, in a 2021 [letter](#) to President Biden asking him to get rid of sanctions on Venezuela:

“...the impact of sectoral and secondary sanctions is **indiscriminate, and purposely so**. Although U.S. officials regularly say that the sanctions target the government and not the people, the whole point of the “maximum pressure” campaign is to increase the economic cost to Venezuela... Economic pain is the means by which the sanctions are supposed to work.... **it is not Venezuelan officials who suffer the costs. It is the Venezuelan people**. Credible sources have consistently found that sanctions have worsened the humanitarian crisis in the country.”

*(Emphasis added)*



# Pompeo: Intentional humanitarian crises

- Context: March 2019, Venezuela oil production had fallen by 36 percent since the 2017 Trump sanctions
- **Former Secretary Mike Pompeo** [remarks](#) at a press conference:

“Well, we wish things could go faster, but I’m very confident that the tide is moving in the direction of the Venezuelan people and will continue to do so. It doesn’t take much for you to see what’s really going on there. The circle is tightening, **the humanitarian crisis is increasing by the hour.** I talked with our senior person on the ground there in Venezuela last night, at 7:00 or 8:00 last night. **You can see the increasing pain and suffering that the Venezuelan people are suffering from.”**

*(Emphasis added)*



# Trump response to Covid crisis

- Phillip Reeves, "[Many Venezuelan Hospitals Lack Basics To Function, Let Alone Handle COVID-19,](#)" NPR, April 10, 2020  
“The coronavirus emergency, coupled with rock-bottom prices for oil, a top source of Venezuela's government revenue, has weakened [Maduro's] position, prompting the **U.S. to intensify efforts to drive him from power.**”

*(Emphasis added)*



- Sanctions that target civilians violate a number of treaties signed by the US:
  - **UN Charter** (Principle of Non-Intervention, Article 2.4)
  - **OAS Charter** (Principle of Non-Intervention, Art. 19 and 20)
  - **Geneva Conventions** (Ban of Collective Punishment, Art. 33 Geneva IV)



# The Fourth Geneva Convention (Rights of Civilians)

- The Geneva Conventions outlaw collective punishment, making these sanctions a war crime if committed during a war

“ART. 33. — No protected person may be punished for an offence he or she has not **personally committed**. **Collective penalties** and likewise all measures of intimidation or of terrorism are **prohibited.**”

- [UNHCR Special Rapporteur Idriss Jazairy:](#)

"These civilians deserve the same protections provided by the Geneva Conventions to people in war.... harming the human rights of ordinary civilians should not be resorted to as a means of political pressure on a targeted Government. **This is illegal under international human rights law.**"



# The human costs of sanctions: Deaths in Venezuela

- **Financial, oil, and secondary** sanctions
- The role of sanctions in destroying Venezuela's economy is clear and pronounced
- In the first year following the Trump sanctions against Venezuela, they caused **tens of thousands of deaths** ([Weisbrot and Sachs, Economic Sanctions as Collective Punishment: The Case of Venezuela](#)).
- **Bank for International Settlements:** a recession in a developing country increases mortality on average by 0.5 per thousand population ([Econometric data from BIS Working Paper No 910](#)).
  - This would imply **15,000 deaths** in Venezuela
  - But Venezuela experienced a record-breaking depression, so the deaths caused by sanctions would be expected to be much greater than this





# The human costs of sanctions: Hyperinflation

- Baseline: Median hyperinflation episode in Latin America since WWII has lasted 4 months
- Venezuela: More than three years
- Economic recovery without access to finance can be impossible, even if a government does everything in its power



# Sanctions and migration

- Biggest **increase of migrants** in the past year has been from **Venezuela and Cuba**.
- **414,127 arrivals** of Venezuelan and Cuban migrants at the border in 2022
  - **increase of 361 percent** from the previous year (US Customs and Border Protection)
- [Letter](#) from 21 members of Congress to President Biden on May 1, 2023:

“Experts widely agree that broad-based U.S. sanctions — expanded to an unprecedented level by former President Donald Trump — **are a critical contributing factor in the current increase in migration....** “In light of their **grave humanitarian toll** on the peoples of those countries, and the significant logistical challenges that the resulting increase in migration is causing for federal, state, and local authorities, we urge you to act swiftly to lift the failed and **indiscriminate economic** sanctions that were imposed by the prior administration...”

*(Emphasis added)*



# In conclusion

**Given that these sanctions target civilians and can cause tens or even hundreds of thousands of deaths, how can our government continue to use them?**

*Questions? Comments? Thank you for your attention!*

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**Thank you.**

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