



Abby Martin's Speech on US Sanctions & Economic Gangsterism

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Abby Martin: Thank you so much for having me on this panel. It's a great honour to be included in the conversation. Right now at Biden's Summit of the Americas the United States is posing as the arbiter of human rights and democracy. It's granting itself basically the right to dictate the future of Latin America. And we know that several countries are excluded from this summit for the crime of charting their own paths, their own future, not being subservient to the empire. And all that this summit really is, is for Biden to project imperial dominance over a region that he calls his front yard.

A recent cost of war study reveals that US counterterrorism operations have been active in 83 countries in the last three years. In Latin America alone, there have been about 60 US military interventions since 1890. The United States perpetuates this daily violence and subjugation not to spread democracy or human rights, but to extract resources and protect capital. This global empire does not only use brute military force to impose capitalism's world order, it's learnt from past blunders of obvious coups and regime change wars that have come to define its naked imperialism.

During the Cold War, they were pretty open about this. They were open about the threat of communism posed to this order. Today, the premise of the empire remains the same, but it speaks in a much different language. The language of humanitarian intervention and basically doublespeak, right, of humanitarianism, liberal interventionism and so on. It cloaks its goals and control through hybrid war methods of mass propaganda and economic warfare through the use of sanctions, which they call soft power. Sanctions are administered with the pretence of peaceful coercion to bypass war. But the reality is that sanctions are war, and they cause the same amount of mass suffering and death just with plausible deniability.

Of course, sanctions are nothing new, we all know the horrific devastation wrought by sanctions during the Gulf War in the 90s that killed 500,000 children. But in a post- 9/11 world, the US system of financial weaponry has grown with extreme precision. The Patriot Act gave the Treasury power to sever ties between US economic infrastructure, which most

of the world relies on, and entire national jurisdictions. This causes a profound, chilling effect for all global institutions who opt to cut off entire countries rather than risk penalties. These sweeping powers are unconstrained and largely undefined and have the power to decimate economies and leave countries in financial ruin. From 2000 to 2021 the use of sanctions increased nearly 1,000%. Leaders from both parties use them now as the primary method to force countries to fall in line. Trump dramatically increased sanctions on every targeted country, and Biden has pretty much maintained all of them. According to Biden's Treasury Department they are the foreign policy tool of first resort. And today US sanctions affect a third of humanity, with more than 8000 measures on 42 different countries. Presidents no longer have to deal with pressuring Congress into voting for war. No not because they would face any real opposition for doing so, but because they can cause debilitating harm against their so-called adversaries with barely any oversight or media coverage. When Venezuela's economic free fall, Cuba's food shortages, or Afghanistan's severe famine are even covered by the corporate media, the utterance of sanctions is almost always omitted in the context of why these things are happening. It's always just in a vacuum, right? It's always on the shoulders of *those* governments.

At Biden's summit down the street they're going to tell you that these sanctions are good and they're necessary in the interests of human rights and democracy. They're going to say that they're justified because they only target despotic leaders whose values don't represent ours. That's the first big lie, obviously. Anyone can look at who the US supports around the world and see that its closest allies are theocratic dictatorships like Israel, or I'm sorry, like Saudi Arabia, of course. Military dictatorships like Israel or flagrant human rights abusers like Colombia or Uganda. Not only do these countries not get sanctioned, but they all receive massive financial assistance, military aid, training. All of these countries serve as linchpins for the empire in their respective continents. And nothing they can do, including the mass killing of peaceful protesters or the state sanctioned execution of American journalists, will warrant the United States to break these bonds.

The second big lie is that the United States has the ordained right to decide which countries should be subjected to punishment. What leaders a country deserves, and the process in which they can choose these leaders. If people elected leaders that they do not like for something as simple as not wanting to take out IMF loans, or for wanting to use their own resources for their own people, the United States will use its massive amount of leverage as a superpower to dole out extreme punishment. You must accept your role as a colonial imperial outpost, or you will face consequences. This is gangsterism.

The third and most insidious lie is that Biden's summit is telling right now that sanctions only impact the powerful, the elite and their corrupt inner circles. With the help of corporate media this lie has been facilitated very well, and in fact, a lot of well-intentioned liberals also believe this to be true. They think, Well, we have to do something, right? We have to punish these elites in power who abuse their people. But literally, anywhere you look where sanctions are deployed the opposite is true. Sanctions are specifically designed to target the most defenceless and vulnerable people, the young, the elderly, the sick and the disabled.

They cause massive food shortages. They force people to ration basic goods they need to survive. They directly target the public infrastructure of those countries, and they sadistically deny health care and lifesaving medication for people who need it.

Venezuela, we know that in just two years, sanctions were responsible for the deaths of 40,000 people. And I know that we've heard this statistic, but before moving on, I just really want you to sit there and wrap your mind around it because it's really horrific. 40,000 lives extinguished. 40,000 people whose families are shattered. 40,000 people. It's a statistic that we just say, right, but we can't even comprehend how many people that is. And that's just a drop in the bucket for the empire. Again, plausible deniability.

In Cuba, the blockade has continued to tighten more and more to the point that lifesaving vaccines could not be administered because they could not import things like syringes. During the height of the pandemic government officials had to make the choice, the heart wrenching choice, to give COVID patients oxygen or babies formula. Imagine making that choice. Do you give someone oxygen to survive or do you give a helpless infant what they need to have a chance at life? That's the choices that Cuban officials are making daily because of the barbarism from this government and the economic blockade that continues.

This is nothing short of economic terrorism that deprives tens of millions of people the human right to live freely. It is collective punishment, and it is a crime against humanity. The purpose of sanctions is not to pressure leaders to adopt human rights. It's to make these populations in these countries feel so much pain and suffering that they feel that the only way they can improve their lives is if they overthrow their government and somehow install a pro-US government that will alleviate their suffering and leave them be. That's their objective strategy. That is literally what they think sanctions will do. But what really happens? What really happens when the US succeeds in getting what they want as they have dozens of times in Latin America alone? They send in henchmen at the IMF and the World Bank to force reliance on the US dollar to make these countries take out massive loans with strict conditions to prevent them from developing on their own.

For example, we know one of the reasons for the US backed coup in Haiti is because they were thinking of raising the minimum wage. And of course, multinational corporations could not have that, right?! They wanted Haiti to basically remain as a sweatshop for multinational corporations. So they decided to back a brutal coup for the crime of wanting to give their people a better life.

The countries that bow to the dictates of the United States remain in a state of utter destitution. US control does not mean an improvement in your daily lives or the quality of life, it just means military bases will be in your country that destroy your land. It means that the natural resources are stripped and stolen. It means that your sovereignty has been robbed. As Michael Parenti once said, There are no poor countries. You don't go to poor countries to make money. These countries are rich. Only the people are poor. These countries are not underdeveloped. They are over exploited by the capitalists who steal trillions of *their* wealth.

These billionaires are sick sociopaths. We all heard Elon Musk proudly boast, We will coup whoever we want. They are shameless.

And the whole purpose of Biden's summit down the street is to say that all these problems that face Latin America could be solved by the United States. Our leadership and guidance of this great country. But what everyone in this room knows already, and what I've seen firsthand in Cuba and Venezuela and so many other places, it's not the politicians from the imperial core that have the answers. It's the poor and working people who have the answers. They know how to use their resources for their own people and for their own good. Even under the most horrific and repressive conditions that this government imposes on so many tens of millions of people around the world, the people will always find a way to survive. And the harsher conditions become, the more class consciousness grows, one rooted in international solidarity, one that links the struggles we all face to capitalism, militarism, imperialism. That's the real threat. Taking the power back and telling the Pentagon that, no, you will not be the ones that dictate our future. We will decide our own future. And we will fight for our lives to do so. Thank you.

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