Amid war threats, Washington blocks UN resolution demanding end to sanctions

Bill Van Auken
4 April 2020

Washington and its allies Thursday killed a United Nations resolution calling for the lifting of unilateral sanctions that are severely impeding efforts to combat the spread of the global COVID-19 pandemic.

The resolution was drafted by Russia and co-sponsored by 28 other member states. In addition to backing the call by the World Health Organization for an internationally coordinated campaign against the deadly virus, it appealed for all countries to "refrain from raising trade barriers, imposing new export restrictions, or implementing protectionist and discriminatory measures inconsistent with the WTO [World Trade Organization] rules as well as not to apply any unilateral coercive measures undertaken without the mandate of the Security Council."

Under rules adopted by the UN with the General Assembly not in session, approval of resolutions requires unanimous consent. Joining the US in blocking the resolution were the European Union and the United Kingdom, along with the right-wing anti-Russian governments of Ukraine and Georgia.

Following the vote late Thursday, the Russian mission to the UN issued a statement declaring, "We regret that a small group of states championing sanctions-based policy appeared unready to respond to the call of the UN Secretary-General and refused to cast aside politicized approaches and interests."

UN Secretary General António Guterres on Wednesday issued a report on the COVID-19 pandemic which, in part, stated that "Sanctions imposed on countries should be waived to ensure access to food, essential supplies and access to COVID-19 tests and medical support. This is the time for solidarity not exclusion."

In place of the Russian-drafted resolution, the General Assembly approved a version vetted by Washington which issued a toothless call for "solidarity," while ignoring the issues of sanctions against oppressed countries and the trade war and protectionist measures that effectively preclude any genuine international approach to the pandemic.

The US delegation failed, however, in its attempt to get the UN to label the pandemic as the "Chinese" or "Wuhan" virus, a theme pushed by the Trump administration to exploit the crisis to further US imperialism's geo-strategic confrontation with Beijing and to divert attention from the abject failure of the US government to either prepare for or mount an adequate response to the increasingly uncontrolled spread of the coronavirus throughout the US population.

Despite worldwide calls for sanctions relief, Washington has only escalated the unilateral and illegal sanctions that it has imposed upon Iran and Venezuela, so-called "maximum pressure" regimes that are tantamount to a state of war. The US imposed new sanctions against both countries last month.

Iran, with an officially reported 53,183 COVID-19 cases and 3,294 deaths—both believed to be major underestimates of the real ravages of the disease—is suffering one of the highest fatality rates in the world. "Based on our information, every 10 minutes one person dies from the coronavirus and some 50 people become infected with the virus every hour in Iran," Iran's Health Ministry spokesman Kianush Jahanpur said on Thursday.

Even before the pandemic, the country's health care system was groaning under the impact of sweeping sanctions that have prevented the country from buying essential medicines and medical supplies on the world market, leading to the deaths of many suffering from cancer and other diseases. The Trump administration has repeatedly made the cynical claim that humanitarian supplies are exempted under its "maximum pressure" campaign, but the reality is that access has been effectively blocked with the blacklisting Iran's central bank and the threat of third-party sanctions against anyone conducting financial transactions with the country.

Iran's Academy of Medical Sciences released a blistering statement directed to the UN Secretary General on Thursday declaring that the UN and the WHO, "which claim to defend the rights of humanity, have taken no effective measures to lift the cruel sanctions against our dear children, women, men and patients."

Denouncing the US for its escalating sanctions, the statement continued: "It is certain that history will judge the ineffectiveness and silence of international organizations claiming protection of international law and human rights against such crimes. These institutions have become toothless, if not complicit, and we will undoubtedly see the unraveling of our world order because of this refusal to take action against crass violations of international and humanitarian law by the

© World Socialist Web Site

U.S. regime."

On Wednesday, Trump issued an explicit threat of military aggression against Iran, claiming, without providing a shred of evidence, that Iran "or its proxies" in Iraq were plotting a "sneak attack" on "US troops and/or assets in Iraq," and threatening that Iran would "pay a very heavy price."

The Pentagon has deployed Patriot missile batteries to Iraq, over the protests of the Iraqi government, whose parliament voted in January, in the wake of the US drone assassination of Gen. Qassem Suleimani, one of Iran's most senior leaders, at Baghdad international airport, for a resolution demanding the immediate withdrawal of US troops occupying the country. Baghdad has opposed the missile deployments, seeing them as potential preparation for an all-out war that could turn war-battered Iraq itself into a battlefield yet again.

Threats against Venezuela, the target of equally punishing sanctions have been even more explicit, with Trump announcing Wednesday that US Navy warships and other assets are being deployed to the Venezuelan coast on the pretext of combatting drug trafficking. The announcement followed a US Justice Department indictment of the Venezuelan president and other top officials on trumped-up drug-related charges, replete with the issuing of "Wanted" posters placing a $15 million bounty on Maduro's head.

The threat of military violence follows the imposition of yet another round of sanctions against Venezuela last month.

Thus far, Venezuela has reported only 146 confirmed cases and five deaths, but the crisis of the country's health care system under the impact of US sanctions threatens to turn the pandemic into a death sentence against countless numbers of workers and poor.

The flailing militarist threats of the White House, a desperate bid to divert growing anger over the catastrophic failure of the US government to mitigate the effects of the coronavirus, have provoked signs of dissension within the Pentagon as the military brass faces the threat of the pandemic sweeping through military units operating in close quarters, including on ships and overseas deployments.

The magazine *Foreign Policy* posted an article on its website Friday reporting that "The U.S. Defense Department has pushed back sharply against President Donald Trump's decision to send a phalanx of naval assets to interdict drug shipments in the Caribbean Sea." It cited officials as saying that the deployment was "all politics" and came at a time in which the Pentagon was "pausing some deployments due to the impacts of COVID-19."

It also follows the firestorm over the outbreak of coronavirus on the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt and the sacking of its commanding officer, Capt. Brett Crozier, for demanding that the Navy address the crisis by providing quarantine facilities for the more than 4,000 sailors aboard the ship who had been exposed to the deadly virus.

Crozier was sacked after his appeal to the Navy, which insisted, "Sailors do not need to die. If we do not act now, we are failing to properly take care of our most trusted asset—our sailors," was leaked to the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

Justifying his decision to relieve Crozier of his command, acting US Navy Secretary Thomas Modly— installed after the former secretary, Richard Spencer, was fired in connection with Trump's pardoning of the convicted war criminal Navy SEAL Eddie Gallagher—said that his plea "created the perception that the Navy is not on the job, the government is not on the job and it's just not true."

The captain's plea, issued in the face of the refusal of the Navy or the Trump administration to take any action, was indeed true in relation not only to the USS Theodore Roosevelt, but to the government's response to the coronavirus pandemic as a whole.

The response of his own crew was made clear by videos posted on Facebook early Friday showing several hundred sailors massing in an airplane hangar and chanting his name as he walked down a gangplank from the vessel.

An online petition posted on change.org demanding Crozier's reinstatement gathered 150,000 signatures within barely 24 hours. Among those signing were members of his crew, Navy veterans and relatives of active-duty sailors.

One sailor wrote, "He's my CO and I want him to know he did right by us, even if it won't bring him back."

Another signer stated, "The Captain's primary job is to protect the health and well-being of his crew. Captain Crozier did this. And he was punished. In contrast, soldiers convicted of war crimes are pardoned by Trump. That is appalling and wrong. The world is upside down."

And a third wrote, "Just because his chain of command was prepared to let the ship become a floating morgue he was not."

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site