THE CURRENT MIGRANT CRISIS:

HOW U.S. POLICY TOWARD LATIN AMERICA HAS FUELED HISTORIC NUMBERS OF ASYLUM SEEKERS

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INTRODUCTION

> *"U.S. economic warfare against three specific countries–Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua–is a significant cause of the latest migration surge."*

The U.S. immigration crisis has reached a new boiling point. Apprehensions by federal agents of people crossing the U.S. Southern border is at a near-record high.[1] For the past year, tens of thousands of asylum seekers have appeared in cities like New York, Chicago, Philadelphia and Denver, many of them dispatched northward in buses by the governors of Texas and Florida. The newcomers have overwhelmed local governments as municipal leaders frantically try to provide them emergency shelter, food and other basic services, while the news media constantly note the surprising number of destitute and displaced Venezuelans among them. That emergency assistance, however, has sparked a growing backlash from the general public, particularly among Americans who advocate clamping down on immigration, but also among some low-income Black and Latino residents in those cities whose communities have suffered years of neglect by the same local governments. Many of those residents have voiced increasing alarm about the sudden diversion of scarce tax funds for the siting of temporary migrant shelters in their neighborhoods.

But few media accounts have examined the way U.S. foreign policy toward specific Latin American countries has directly fueled the current crisis. Nor have those narratives acknowledged the long history of U.S. intervention and wealth extraction in the region, which, together with decades of neglect of Latin America's social needs by both Democratic and Republican administrations in Washington, has led to more than six decades of massive human migration from that region to the U.S.

Mexico's president Andrés Manuel López Obrador summed up the current crisis best when he said recently that U.S. sanctions, especially against Venezuela and Cuba, have directly caused the recent migration surge. "That's why we're going to keep insisting on addressing the root causes of migration," López Obrador said on Oct. 2 in his most pointed comments so far. "The origins, go deep… sanctions cannot be maintained — blockades — and the poorest countries have to be helped," he added. Likewise, Colombia's new President Gustavo Petro said recently: "If we truly want to end the disastrous human exodus through the Darien [Gap], the economic blockade of Venezuela must be ended."[2]

This report briefly outlines the evidence that U.S. economic warfare against three specific countries – Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua – is a significant cause of the latest migration surge. It argues, furthermore, that progressive U.S. leaders and the general public should advocate for a more humane and responsible foreign policy – one that could not only dramatically reduce migration from the region but also address the mushrooming labor shortage within the U.S.

CHANGING PATTERNS OF MIGRATION FROM LATIN AMERICA

Ever since the 1970s, Mexican migrants have represented not only the overwhelming percentage of people apprehended crossing the U.S. border without authorization, but also of our country's estimated undocumented population of 11 million. Still, the Mexican portion of both has dropped significantly over the past decade. The total number of undocumented Mexicans in the U.S. has plummeted from 7.7 million (70 per cent of all the undocumented) just before the 2008-9 Great Recession, to 5.2 million (46 per cent) in 2021. In other words, even though Mexicans remain the largest percentage of unauthorized entrants into the country each year, their numbers are falling, and

more undocumented Mexicans have left the U.S. since 2008 than those who entered and stayed in the country.[3]

During both the Obama and Trump administrations, a new pattern emerged: the biggest surges in unauthorized migrants at the Southern border shifted to the Northern Triangle countries of Central America – Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador, the reasons for which we do not delve into here.

LATEST MIGRANTS ARE FROM COUNTRIES RAVAGED BY U.S. SANCTIONS

The migrant flow, however, suddenly changed again during the past few years. Venezuelans apprehended at the border, for example, skyrocketed from a tiny 4,500 in FY 2020 to the more than 265,000 in the first 11 months FY 2023! In the same period, Nicaraguans jumped from just 3,164 to 131,831. And Cubans spiraled from just 14,000 in 2020 to more than 184,00 in 2023.

Amazingly, more Cubans have sought to enter the U.S. during the past two years than at any time in U.S. history –

surpassing the refugee waves in the first years after the Cuban Revolution of 1959, during the Mariel boatlift of 1980, or during the balsero raft crisis of 1994.

A similar pattern holds true for asylum requests. Of some 412,000 asylum applications filed with Department of Homeland Security during the first 11 months of FY 2023, more than half came from just four countries: Venezuela was #1, Cuba #2, Colombia #3, and Nicaragua #4.[4]

In short, three countries whose citizens comprise the bulk of the latest migrant surge – Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua – have all been targeted by Washington for regime change through economic sanctions, a form of financial warfare that has only made life worse for their citizens.

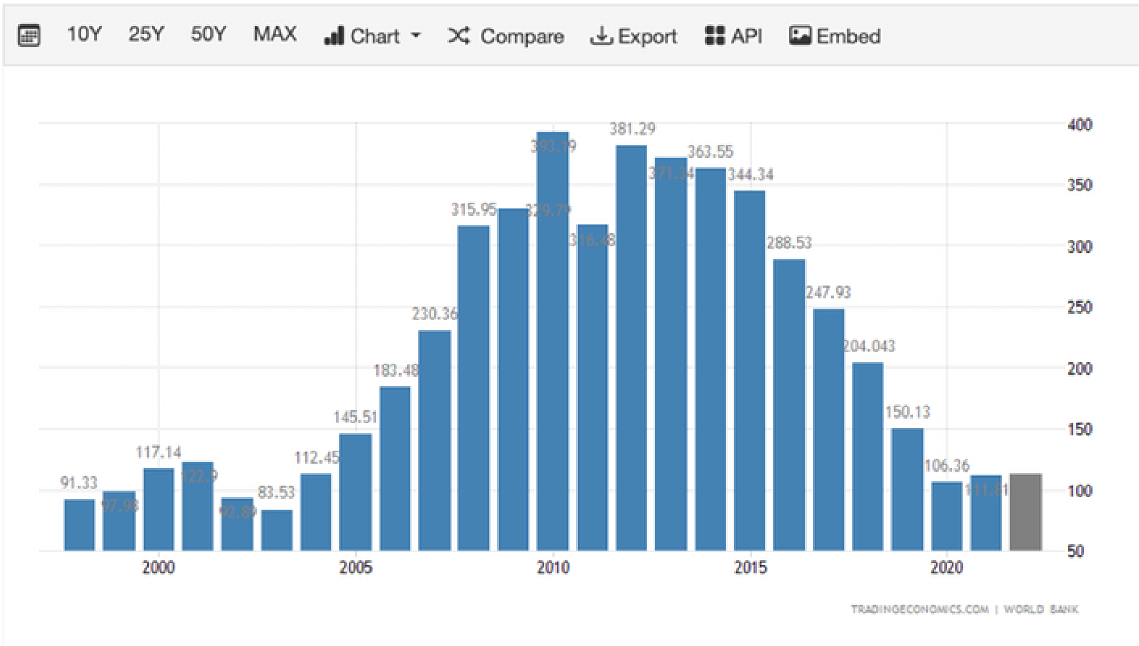
Moreover, the U.S. doesn't even have normal diplomatic relations with Cuba and Venezuela so it is far more difficult to repatriate migrants from those countries that we would otherwise deport.

WHY ARE SO MANY PEOPLE FLEEING VENEZUELA?

Despite the enormous media coverage of the Venezuelan migrant crisis, very little attention has been paid to the conditions in their homeland that have compelled the migrants to leave. Only a few decades ago, Venezuela – a country with the world's largest petroleum reserves – enjoyed the highest standard of living in Latin America. But for more than a decade it has suffered repeated political turmoil, and during the past eight years it has gone through the greatest economic collapse of any country in the region's history, with its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) shrinking by 74%. U.S. hostility toward Venezuela's government, however, started much earlier, back in 1999, when Hugo Chávez, a charismatic left-wing former military officer, assumed the presidency through democratic elections. Chávez quickly began to shift his country toward a socialist economy, and he soon emerged as a vocal critic of U.S. policy in the region.

The Bush administration responded by backing a failed coup attempt against him in 2002, then cutting off military weapons sales to Venezuela in 2006, while Congress repeatedly funded civic opposition groups and protests within Venezuela against the government, largely through grants to the Agency for International Development and the National Endowment for Democracy.[5] Yet despite the hostility from Washington, Chávez remained widely popular within his country and throughout Latin America for all of his 14 years in office.[6] During that time, Venezuela's GDP soared (see chart below), and its rates of extreme poverty, unemployment, and infant mortality dropped sharply.[7]

The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Venezuela was worth 111.81 billion US dollars in 2021, according to official data from the World Bank. The GDP value of Venezuela represents 0.05 percent of the world economy. source: World Bank

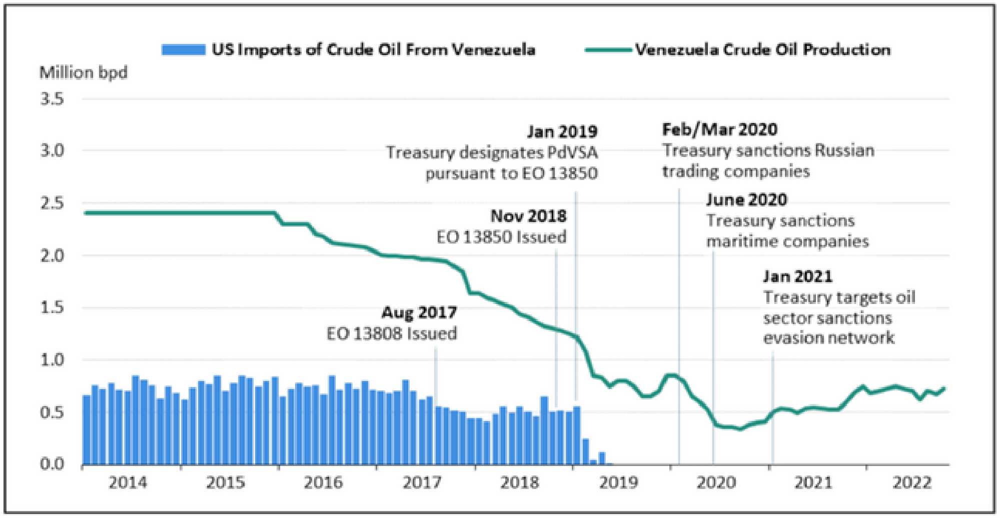


After Chávez's sudden death from cancer in 2013, his successor Nicolás Maduro narrowly won a popular election, but the outcome was so close that it spurred the hopes among the Venezuelan elite and our leaders in Washington that Chávez's Bolivarian revolution was on the verge of being turned back. Protests against Maduro erupted more frequently, as did Maduro's repression of his opponents and his curtailing of civil liberties. In late 2014 President Obama signed an executive order – not publicly released until March 2015 – in which he declared that conditions in Venezuela had become a national emergency and an "extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States."[8] The order never spelled out exactly how a small South American country hundreds of miles away, with a standing army of only 100,000 troops, could suddenly become a threat to world's most powerful nation. Nonetheless, Obama launched a series of economic sanctions against Venezuela.

His successor Donald Trump followed in 2017 with even broader sanctions which closed off Venezuela's access to Western debt financing, forced many U.S. and foreign companies to leave the country, and crippled its oil industry, the Venezuelan government's main source of revenue. Trump even froze the assets in 2019 of CITGO Petroleum, a U.S. company that is wholly owned by Venezuela's state oil company. CITGO's refineries and gas stations in the U.S. are enormously valuable. In 2022 they generated $24 billion in revenues and more than $2.8 billion in profit, but Trump's actions effectively prevented any of that money from reaching the Venezuelan government and its people.[9] The connection between Venezuela's plummeting oil exports and U.S. sanctions is best illustrated in the chart below from the Congressional Research Service.

Figure 5. Venezuela Crude Oil Production, U.S. Imports, and Selected Sanction Events

(January 2014-October 2022)



Source: CRS, using data from the Energy Information Administration.

Notes: PdVSA = Petroleos de Venezuela S.A.; E.O. = executive order; bpd = barrels per day.

E.O. 13808 imposed additional sanctions based on a national emergency declared in March 2015 (E.O. 13692), including limits imposed on PdVSA access to U.S. debt finance and a provision preventing PdVSA from receiving cash dividends from its U.S.-based Citgo refining and marketing subsidiary.

Following a disputed 2018 re-election of Maduro, the U.S. and the European Union refused to recognize the vote results and claimed instead that Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaido, not Maduro, was the country's legitimate president – a position the United Nations never supported, and one that even the Venezuelan opposition and the European Union abandoned in early 2021.[10] Meanwhile, the White House joined with the United Kingdom to freeze Venezuelan gold reserves stored in the Bank of England worth an estimated $2 billion. The Justice Department even announced in 2020 a $15 million bounty for the capture of Maduro on alleged drug trafficking charges.[11]

The effect of these massive U.S. sanctions caused the Venezuelan state to lose between $17 billion and $31 billion in oil revenues between 2017 and 2020, according to a study by the non-profit Washington Office on Latin America. Given that Venezuela normally imports 90 percent of its pharmaceuticals and 70 percent of its food, the loss of such a vast quantity of U.S. dollars from its shrinking oil exports has crippled its economy. A report co-authored by Columbia University economist Jeffrey Sachs concluded that U.S. "sanctions have inflicted, and increasingly inflict, very serious harm to human life and health, including an estimated more than 40,000 deaths from 2017–2018."[12] The Maduro government's own mismanagement of the economy and its authoritarian actions have no doubt contributed to the largest mass exodus in the history of Latin America – seven million Venezuelans fled the country over the past few years –– but it is also clear that U.S. policy has significantly accelerated that mass flight by devastating Venezuela's economy with sanctions and through the political chaos that has resulted from our government's outright funding of opposition groups inside the country.

> *"U.S. sanctions have inflicted, and increasingly inflict, very serious harm to human life and health, including an estimated more than 40,000 deaths from 2017-2018." – Columbia University economist Jeffrey Sachs*

Recently arrived Venezuelans, it should also be noted, are considerably distinct from most previous waves of migrants crossing the U.S. border. The adult Venezuelans are generally far more educated than other Latin American immigrants. A recent study by the non-profit Migration Policy Institute, for example,

found that 62 percent of adult Venezuelan who entered the U.S between 2017 and 2021 had a college bachelor's degree or higher, compared to only 34 per cent for other immigrants, and to 35 percent for U.S.-born adults.

Back in Venezuela, by comparison, only 21 per cent of adults had a bachelor's degree as of 2015. In other words, many asylum seekers from Venezuela are not from that country's poorest sectors, rather they most likely come from that country's middle and professional classes.[13]

THE ENDLESS CUBA EMBARGO

Unlike with Venezuela, Americans are far more familiar with the U.S. embargo against Cuba, which has endured now for more than sixty years. But few realize

our government is virtually alone in the world in pursuing this form of unilateral economic warfare against another nation.

In October 2022, the UN General Assembly voted overwhelmingly – for the 30th consecutive year – to condemn the policy as a violation of the UN Charter. By a vote of 185-to-2, the UN called for "ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba." Only the U.S. and Israel opposed the non-binding resolution, and only Ukraine and Brazil abstained.[14] And there is considerable reason for the UN's consistent stance. A 2018 report by the world body found that the embargo has cost Cuba's economy an estimated $130 billion in lost revenue, thus punishing an entire population for a political purpose: forcing Cuba's socialist government to change its domestic policy and allow more Western-style democracy. Critics of the Cuba embargo note the U.S. has long conducted extensive trade with other socialist governments such as Vietnam, China, and the former Soviet Union before its collapse, and that Washington has rarely targeted those countries for sanctions. Likewise, the U.S. routinely trades with authoritarian capitalist governments such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt. In Egypt's case, our government permits bilateral trade despite the current Egyptian government currently holding an estimated 60,000 political prisoners, and Washington even provides Egypt more than $1.4 billion in annual foreign aid.[15]

The exodus of Cubans from their homeland the past two years, however, is far greater in size than at any similar period in U.S. history. It began after former President Trump revoked the process of normalizing Cuba relations that his predecessor Barack Obama had initiated. Instead, Trump resumed the old embargo policy, hoping perhaps that after the 2016 death of that country's longtime president Fidel Castro, Cuba's communist leadership would not survive in power. Trump even cut off vital cash remittances to the island from Cuban-Americans in the U.S. to their relatives back home and he reclassified Cuba as a state-sponsor of terrorism. As a result, the number of U.S. tourists to Cuba declined sharply, and, during the COVID pandemic of 2019-2020, so did tourism to the island from other parts of world. Given the critical importance of the tourist trade to Cuba, the country's economy plummeted by more than 10 percent and has still not fully recovered.[16]

"During the past two years, nearly as many Cuban migrants (409,250) have been apprehended crossing the Southwest border as Venezuelans (451,153)."

More Cubans, as would be expected, felt forced to migrate. But whereas prior refugee waves from that island nation had largely sought to cross the narrow and dangerous Florida straits in small boats to reach the U.S., an increasing number of Cubans started to opt for a more roundabout route – through Panama's Darien Gap, to Central American and Mexico, then on to the U.S. Southern border. Ironically, the U.S. policy of economic warfare against another country in the region, Nicaragua, ended up making that Cuban trek even easier. In November 2021, Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega, responding to U.S. sanctions imposed against his government by President Trump, suddenly eliminated visa requirements for any Cubans visiting Nicaragua. That made it convenient for Cubans to fly directly to Managua, and from there make the shorter trip northward to the U.S. border. In the months immediately after Ortega's decision (FY 2022), the Department of Homeland Security "encountered about 213,709 unique Cuban nationals at the Southwest border, a seven-fold increase over FY 2021 rates, and a marked 29-fold increase over FY 2020," the agency reported.[17]

Despite that remarkable increase,

it is not widely known by the American public that during the past two years, nearly as many Cuban migrants (409,250) have been apprehended by U.S. Customs and Border Patrol crossing the Southwest border as Venezuelans (451,153).

The Cubans have garnered far less nationwide attention because they tend to settle in just one part of the country. Of all Cuban immigrants who arrived here since 2017, 76 percent headed to Florida, where a long-established and influential Cuban population already exists, one that has helped to facilitate their integration into U.S. society.[18]

SANCTIONS AGAINST NICARAGUA

Until two years ago, Nicaragua had not experienced a major out-migration to the U.S. in nearly four decades, not since the devastating civil wars of the 1980s that engulfed El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua, wars whose horrific violence prompted tens of thousands of Central Americans to flee northward. Back then, however, our government treated refugees from the three countries very differently. Between 1983 and 1990, it granted just 2.6 percent of asylum applications from Salvadorans and 1.8 percent from Guatemalans, countries whose repressive governments were allies of Washington, while it granted 25.2 percent of applications from Nicaraguans, whose Sandinista government the Reagan administration was seeking to overthrow through the financing of a Contra rebel army. Even for those Nicaraguans whose asylum applications the federal government denied, very few were actually deported.[19]

The revolutionary Nicaraguan leader Washington opposed back then was Daniel Ortega, who was first elected president in 1984 but voted out of office in 1990. Nearly twenty years later (in 2006), Ortega returned to power in democratic elections, this time with more pragmatic policies that won him broader public support. Boosted by discounted oil from Chavez in Venezuela and by flourishing trade with the U.S., Nicaragua prospered, sharply reducing poverty and dramatically increasing its domestic food production, to the point that Ortega and his Sandinista movement won landslide re-election victories in both 2011 and 2016, though the latter result was marred by allegations of election fraud.[20] By 2018, Nicaraguan opposition leaders and university students launched a protest movement against what they claimed were growing human rights violations and corruption by Ortega and his closest aides. The protests turned into violent confrontations in which the government cracked down heavily. More than 300 people were killed in the protests, including 23 policemen, with several major international human rights groups subsequently issuing strong condemnations of the government's human rights violations.

Reports by some independent investigative journalists, on the other hand, have claimed anti-government protests were instead an attempted violent coup organized by U.S.-funded dissident groups.[21]

In the aftermath of those protests, a new Washington policy took effect. Congress unanimously passed the Nicaragua Investment Conditionality Act (NICA), which President Trump signed in December 2018. It authorized the U.S. to sanction the Nicaraguan government by opposing any new loans to the country by the World Bank, International Monetary Fund or other international agencies and by punishing other countries that assisted its government.[22] Congress amended and expanded the sanctions act in 2021, and the Biden administration has threatened to target Nicaragua further by expelling it from the Central America Free Trade Agreement, which allows preferential access to the U.S. for exports from the region.[23]

Meanwhile, a sweeping new government policy took effect in Costa Rica, Nicaragua's next-door neighbor. A prosperous and stable country with a tradition of welcoming refugees, Costa Rica has historically provided all asylum seekers health care, social benefits and work permits, and it thus became the main place where those leaving Nicaragua in the past decade settled. By 2022, however, the Nicaraguan population there had ballooned to some 400,000, straining the local government's resources. That year, Costa Rican President Rodrigo Chaves declared that the asylum system was being abused by the newcomers, most of whom, he insisted, were not refugees but simply economic migrants. As a result, Costa Rica sharply restricted its asylum laws, making it much harder for foreigners to work or stay in the country.[24] Thus, the combination of U.S. sanctions on Nicaragua and Costa Rica's new restrictive asylum laws suddenly propelled more Nicaraguans to head north to the U.S. border, which has resulted in the recent unprecedented surge of Nicaraguan asylum seekers.

U.S. HISTORY OF INTERVENTION AND NEGLECT IN LATIN AMERICA

Two hundred years ago this December, President James Monroe proclaimed his infamous Monroe Doctrine, which effectively declared Latin America a U.S. sphere of influence, one that was off-limits to the intervention of European powers. Ever since then, our leaders have regarded the region as the U.S. backyard, the heart of our overseas empire. Washington has repeatedly dispatched U.S. troops or used economic and political pressure to control Latin American governments and to exploit the region's resources. The history of that "Big Stick" policy during the early twentieth is well documented.[25] But repeated interventions continued even during the Cold War and in recent decades. They include:

- The **1954** CIA-sponsored coup against the democratically elected Jacobo Arbenz government in Guatemala
- The **1961** CIA-financed Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba
- The **1965** invasion by U.S. troops of the Dominican Republic to crush a popular revolt against a military dictatorship
- The **1973** coup against Salvador Allende in Chile, supported by the CIA
- The Reagan administration's illegal arming of the Contra rebels in the **1980s** against Nicaragua's democratically elected Sandinista government
- The **1989** U.S. invasion of Panama and overthrow of its president Manuel Noriega
- U.S. covert support in **2002** for leaders of the failed coup against Hugo Chavez in Venezuela
- U.S. support of the **2009** right-wing coup against Manuel Zelaya, the democratically elected president of Honduras

More importantly, these interventions are directly related to U.S. immigration. As I have documented in a previous study, the largest migrations from Latin America over the past sixty years have come precisely from those countries the U.S. has repeatedly occupied and most controlled.[26]

At the same time, both Democratic and Republican administrations have largely ignored the economic and social needs of the region's people. For example, U.S. foreign aid to the 33 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean totaled just $3 billion in FY 2023.[27] That's about as much foreign aid as the U.S. gives to Israel every year. The population of Israel, however, is only nine million and it is a relatively prosperous nation, while Latin America and the Caribbean are teeming with more than 650 million inhabitants, 32 percent of whom lived below the poverty line in 2022.[28]

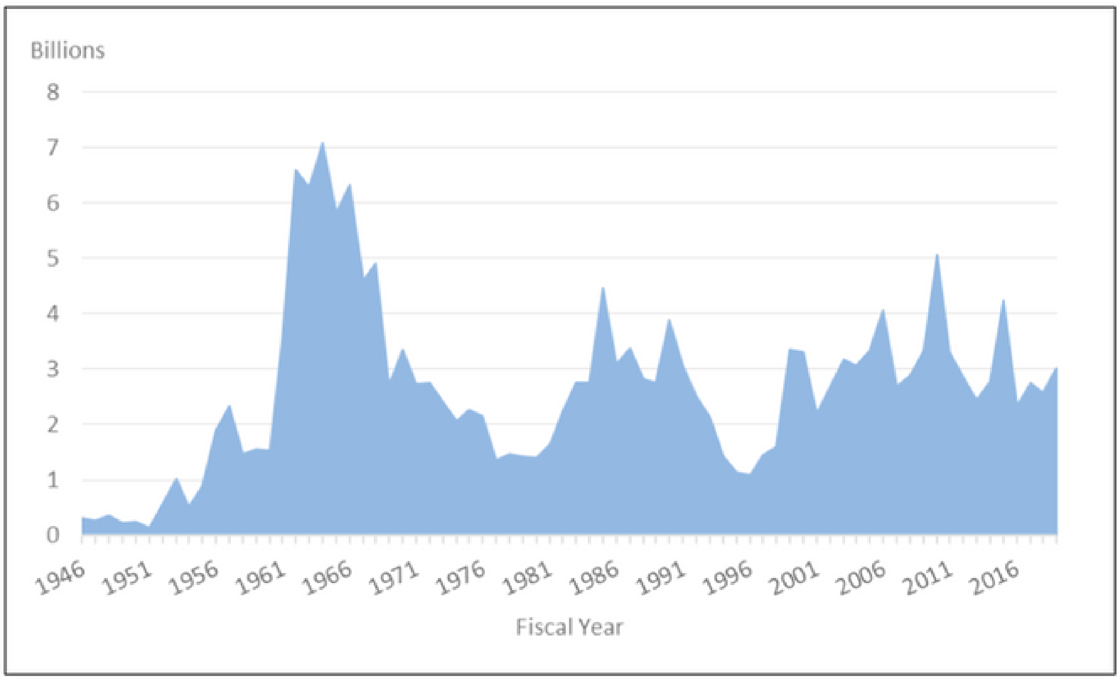
To put the current $3 billion of U.S.- Latin America aid in greater perspective, total foreign assistance allocated by Congress to support the war in Ukraine during FY 2022 was $113 billion, with billions more in additional funding about to be approved.[29]

Moreover, the

total foreign aid Washington gave to Latin America last year amounts to less than half of what it provided the region 60 years ago, during the Kennedy-Johnson administrations,

as revealed in the chart below from the Congressional Research Service:

Figure 2. U.S. Assistance to Latin America and the Caribbean: FY1946-FY2019
(obligations in constant 2019 dollars)



Sources: CRS presentation of data from U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and U.S. Department of State, ForeignAssistance.gov, at https://foreignassistance.gov/.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO EASE THE CRISIS?

In summary, this report posits that U.S. foreign policy toward Latin America, specifically sanctions directed at Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua, have played a major role in crippling the economies of those three nations, thus fueling for the past two years an unprecedented wave of migrants and asylum seekers from those countries that have appeared at our borders. Moreover, it asserts that the root cause of sixty years of constant migration by millions of people from Latin America to the U.S. has been the historic refusal of our political leaders in Washington to reduce the enormous gap in standard of living that exists between the region's countries and our own.[30]

The result has been the periodic flight of the region's people to El Norte, repeated crises at the border, and a broken immigration system. Yet for nearly two decades, since the massive immigration protests of 2006 and an unsuccessful attempt in 2007 by President George W. Bush to fix our immigration laws, Congress has failed to agree on a comprehensive reform, including revamping visa, guest worker, refugee and asylum laws and providing some sort of legal status for the undocumented.

Instead, it has repeatedly approved funding for more border enforcement. Between 2003 – when the Department of Homeland Security was created – and 2021, the U.S. spent an astounding $333 billion on agencies that carry out immigration enforcement. For the current year (FY 2024), President Biden has requested $25 billion just for the budgets of Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).[31] Despite all that money, migrant encounters at the border are at record levels and our immigration system remains completely outdated, ineffective and broken.

"Between 2003…and 2021, the U.S. spent an astounding $333 billion on agencies that carry out immigration enforcement… Despite all that money, migrant encounters at the border are at record levels and our immigration system remains completely outdated, ineffective and broken."

Fixing that broken immigration system is crucial not only for those who want to sharply reduce irregular border crossings, for foreigners who have waited decades for visas to enter the U.S., and for the 11 million undocumented already here who desperately desire a way to legalize their status, but for the U.S. economy as well. We are, after all, an aging nation, one that increasingly will need more young workers as the Baby Boomer generation retires. Quite simply, U.S. employers cannot find enough workers. In August there were nearly 10 million unfilled jobs in the country, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.[32]

Given the situation described above, this report urges several policy reforms as the best way to address the U.S. immigration crisis, both the recent upsurge of asylum seekers and the long-term causes of Latin American migration. While the obvious main solution would be passage of a comprehensive immigration bill that has been stalled for too long in Congress, the following steps would at least mitigate some of the worst aspects of the current crisis:

- **End** the economic warfare against Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua. This is especially true for Venezuela, and even more so for Cuba. It is time our government listen to the rest of the world community and end its destructive embargo against Cuba.
- **Provide** substantial increased federal aid to local governments that have had to provide temporary shelter and food to asylum seekers – perhaps a program similar to the $600 million Congress has already allocated for integrating hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians to whom President Biden has granted Humanitarian Parole.
- **Provide** expedited work permits to both recent asylum seekers admitted into the country and to long-term undocumented immigrants who have established roots in the country, thus helping to ease the immediate labor shortage in the U.S.
- **Sharply increase** annual U.S. foreign aid to Latin America, from the current $3 billion to perhaps $10 billion. Such an investment, when compared to the $25 billion being spent on the Border Patrol and ICE or the $113 billion for Ukraine, will almost certainly produce a more effective reduction of migration from Latin America.

[1] Camilo Montoya Galvez, “Migrant crossings soar to near-record levels, testing Biden’s border strategy,” CBS News, Sept. 21, 2023, at: https://www.cbsnews.com/news/border-crossings-migrants-us-mexico-biden-strategy/#textOver20the20past20two20andthe20end20of20this20month

[2] See Rafael Bernal, “Mexican president blames U.S. sanctions on Cuba and Venezuela for migrant surge,” The Hill, Oct. 3, 2023, at: https://thehill.com/latino/4235507-mexico-president-blames-us-sanctions-on-cuba-and-venezuela-for-migrant-surge/; also “Petro llamó a levantar sanciones contra Venezuela para frenar la crisis migratoria en la región,” Telam Digital, Aug. 9, 2023, at: https://www.telam.com.ar/notas/202309/639588-petro-sanciones-venezuela-migratoria.html.

[3] See Jennifer Van Hook, Julia Gelatt and Ariel G. Ruíz Soto, “A Turning Point for the Unauthorized Immigrant Population in the United States,” Migration Policy Institute, Sept. 2023, at https://www.migrationpolicy.org/news/turning-point-us-unauthorized-immigrant-population. The authors note that many Mexicans who migrated here illegally just to work temporarily returned home when U.S. jobs became scarce during the Great Recession, some were deported by tougher immigration policies, others managed to achieve legal status, and others voluntarily decided to return to their homeland as Mexico’s economy improved. The authors do not mention, however, two aspects of the improving economy that have received little attention in the U.S.: the election in 2018 of left-wing President Lopez Obrador on a pro-labor platform, with his administration sharply raising Mexico’s minimum wage and extending labor rights, plus the hefty tariffs imposed that same year by former President Donald Trump on Chinese imports to the U.S., tariffs that President Biden has maintained and which have led to a boom in foreign investment in Mexico. In fact, given the rising tensions between the U.S. and China, many multinational firms are increasingly adopting a policy of “nearshoring” their foreign production to be closer to the U.S. market, the result being that Mexico recently catapulted to the #1 U.S. trading partner. See: Leda Alvim and Maya Averbuch, “U.S. Nearshoring Wave Grows as Mexico Exports Jump Close to Record.” Bloomberg News, June 28, 2023: https://www.bloomberg.com/news/newsletters/2023-06-28/supply-chain-latest-us-nearshoring-proof-grows-as-mexico-exports-jump#xj4y7vzkg

[4] For migrant encounters by year and nationality, see U.S. Customs and Border Patrol’s “Nationwide Encounters” interactive database at: https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/nationwide-encounters; For historic number of Cuban migrants, see Jiaxin Wei and Jeanne Batalova, “Cuban Immigrants in the United States,” Migration Policy Institute, Sept. 7, 2003, at: https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/cuban-immigrants-united-states#:~:text=In%20fiscal%20year%20(FY)%202022,(“rafter”)%20crisis.

[5] For failed coup see: “Venezuela coup linked to Bush team,” The Guardian, April 21, 2009, at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/apr/21/usa.venezuela ; for account of 17 years of U.S. sanctions, see “Venezuela: Overview of U.S. Sanctions,” Congressional Research Service report, August 8, 2023, at: https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF10715#:~:text=A%20February%202021%20Government%20Accountability,have%20supported%20U.S.%20sanctions%20relief; for U.S. funding of regime change groups, see: Tom Gill and Rebecca Hanson, “How Washington Funded the Counterrevolution in Venezuela,” The Nation, Feb. 8, 2019, at: https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/venezuela-washington-funded-counterrevolution/.

[6] See “Hugo Chávez,” New York Times editorial, Mar. 6, 2013, at: https://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/07/opinion/hugo-Chávez.html.

[7] See “Venezuela GDP - 1960-2022 Historical - Chart,” Trading Economics, 2023 Data at: https://tradingeconomics.com/venezuela/gdp#:~:text=GDP%20in%20Venezuela%20averaged%20107.51,statistics%2C%20economic%20calendar%20and%20news; also “How did Venezuela Change Under Hugo Chávez,” The Guardian, Oct. 4, 2012, at: https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2012/oct/04/venezuela-hugo-Chávez-election-data.

[8] See White House “Fact Sheet: Venezuela Executive Order,” Mar. 9, 2015, at: https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/03/09/fact-sheet-venezuela-executive-order#:~:text=President%20Obama%20today%20issued%20a,targeted%20sanctions%20in%20the%20E.O.

[9] See “CITGO Reports Fourth Quarter and Full Year 2022 Results,” CITGO News Release, Mar. 9, 2023, at: https://www.citgo.com/newsroom/press-releases/2023/citgo-reports-fourth-quarter-and-full-year-2022-results#:~:text=Favorable%20refining%20margins%2C%20high%20product,and%20EBITDA%20of%20%244.4%20billion.

[10] See “EU states no longer recognize Guaido as Venezuela’s interim president,” Reuters, Jan. 25, 2021, at: https://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-politics-eu/eu-states-no-longer-recognise-guaido-as-venezuelas-interim-president-idUSKBN29U1A3#:~:text=The%20EU%27s%2027%20states%20had,EU%20not%20recognising%20that%20vote.

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[30] In 2022, the average per capital personal income for all of Latin America was just $16,324, compared to $65,423 in the U.S. See, TheGlobalEconomy.com at: https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/gdp_per_capita_ppp/Latin-Am/#:~:text=The%20average%20for%202022%20based,in%20Haiti%3A%202799.11%20U.S.%20dollars.
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