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USA

Whose "Security" â€” and for What?

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“Security” becomes the catchword of the moment. Donald Trump’s “big, beautiful wall” will, or won’t, enhance border protections from drugs, trafficking, and all manner of brown people with or without prayer rugs. The threat of repeated government shutdowns might end when the two houses of Congress figured out a deal for “securing the border” that Rush Limbaugh would give Trump permission to sign. Or not.

Meanwhile, there are millions of people without security, whose lives are made worse and more insecure by Trump’s antics and by the cynical manipulations of imperialism, in this hemisphere and globally. Where is “security” for the people of Venezuela, or Honduras, or Yemen, or in African and Asian countries already devastated by effects of climate change?

Start at home. By the time the shutdown of government agencies lurched into its second month, security had taken on a different meaning for 800,000 federal workers furloughed, or performing “essential” work going unpaid. Mostly not high-income earners, they were worrying about the security of their mortgages, their credit ratings (on which, for those with security clearances, their employment may depend), their access to prescription medicines and health care, even the ability to feed their families. Low-paid contract workers, who will probably never be paid for their lost time, faced outright destitution.

The December-January shutdown ended when it became clear by Friday, January 25th that going into another week would cause the airline transport system to collapse. With increased stress, absenteeism among TSA airport workers and air traffic controllers had already reached as high as ten percent, portending a real threat to public security to say nothing of airplane and food safety inspections going undone, government monitoring of violent weather not happening, and funds for low-income subsidized housing and SNAP (food stamp) programs running low.

The head of the flight attendants’ union, Sara Nelson, and even a mainstream analyst on NBC Nightly News, had gone so far as to suggest that TSA workers’ strike action might be needed to end the shutdown. Airline industry executives must have been warning the White House that the health of a significant sector of U.S. capital was at serious risk. That’s why a second shutdown was ultimately unthinkable if only because the air transport system would be going down within days, not weeks.

Trading one debacle for another, Trump of course issued his February 15 presidential “national emergency” declaration in defiance of Congress, Constitutional process and common sense to extract money for his wall. The legal and political catfight over that is just beginning as ATC goes to press. We’ll be finding out whether the institutions of U.S. capitalist political “stability” can defend themselves.

There’s a lot at stake more than a garden-variety abuse of power, this is a first-rate impeachable offense and an astonishing precedent if allowed to stand. If a president can conjure up a national emergency at the border from his own imagination, what’s to stop one from ordering mass roundups of “illegal” immigrants, or restoring torture prisons for actual or alleged terrorists (as Trump has advocated), or abolishing birthright citizenship (as some of his advisors suggest)?

Meanwhile the FBI after decades of murderous abuse of civil rights, now the darling of the liberal wing of the political establishment! warned that its capacity for criminal investigations was seriously compromised. That could have affected its capacity to monitor far-right white racist hate groups if only that were happening in the first place. (We are unable to report whether the FBI was forced to cut back on monitoring and harassing Black Lives

Matter, pro-immigrant sanctuary, and antiwar activist groups.)

Insecurity at Home and Abroad

It's important at this critical moment to get beneath the surface of the "border security" discourse. Trump's vanity wall is absurd, of course, even in terms of his own definitions of national security. The United States is not confronted with an "invasion" of "illegal aliens" storming the border; drugs in large quantities are arriving through ports of entry, not hauled on people's backs through the desert; sex trafficking and exploitation are not facilitated by the "ease" of entering the United States, but precisely by the difficulty of doing so.

Turn the lens to the south: Mexico faces a real and murderous crisis of guns imported from the United States, which get into the hands of wealthy drug gangs and criminal syndicates. Would a "big, beautiful wall" stop this ghastly commerce? Of course not: weapons aren't smuggled a few at a time by foot traffic – they come in wholesale, through myriad ways and means at the cartels' disposal.

In fact, both parts of the hideous two-way drug and weapons traffic, killing people by the thousands in Mexico and the United States, result from the monstrous crime of the failed U.S. "war on drugs." That's the poisonous root of this insecurity. Every serious analyst and medical expert knows this, but practically no Republican or Democratic politicians will say so (with the exception of a maverick like Rand Paul).

Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer emphasize the inability of Trump's wall to stop the influx of drugs. That narrow focus, however, is itself part of the problem. More border agents and space-age technology, the Democrats' more "sensible" proposal, could put a dent in the drug flow, but probably only temporarily and do nothing to prevent the weapons traffic that's destroying so many lives in Mexico and Central America, the biggest cause of people fleeing northward. The accepted "security" discourse serves to obscure the structural and systemic crisis.

Insecurity stalks the lives of millions of U.S. citizens not from terrorist threats both real and imagined, but by economic and financial desperation. The plight of federal employees after one deferred paycheck, let alone two, is a window on structural inequality. These are fulltime workers, not the highest but certainly not the lowest-paid sector of the U.S. labor force, with scarce financial reserves thrown into crisis, even though their eventual back pay was guaranteed.

There are more desperate insecurities for recipients of DACA and Temporary Protected Status, which Trump revoked and then had offered to "extend" as part of the Republicans' pre-shutdown border-wall package. The brave intransigence of the "Dreamers," refusing to trade away the lives of their undocumented families and communities in exchange for their own status, put a measure of backbone into the Democratic leadership on this issue. And that's before we even discuss the mass detention and separation of families who are legally seeking asylum.

Far from easing the crisis driving people out of their homelands, the Trump gang has turned to openly promoting a civil war in Venezuela. The administration even during the U.S. government's own shutdown encouraged the leader of the Venezuelan National Assembly to declare himself interim president, then called on the Venezuelan armed forces to intervene on the side of the "new government" that's been elected by no one, and rallied a consortium of rightist Latin American governments and some of its Western allies to its side.

The political-economic implosion situation in Venezuela was already so dreadful that it was difficult to imagine how it could be made worse but true to form, U.S. imperialism has found a way. Far from a peaceful political resolution that Venezuela desperately needs, the prospect of a fragmented Venezuelan military with the involvement of the new ultra-reactionary Brazilian regime and Colombia's rightwing government could mean horrific violence.

While the governments of Mexico and Uruguay attempt to resolve the Venezuelan crisis, the U.S. neoconservatives work to sabotage the effort. Nothing in the Trump-Bolton-Pompeo scenario for Venezuela points toward any kind of democracy, or toward ending its economic and social collapse.

The United States already endorsed the straight-up stolen and unconstitutional reelection of Juan Orlando Hernandez in Honduras, accompanied by brutal repression that accelerated the flight of refugees from that country. Washington's project in Latin America clearly goes beyond Venezuela, to the restoration of the era of total U.S. imperial dominance.

The appointment of Elliot Abrams — architect of the Reagan administration's 1980s genocidal crimes in Central America, convicted for lying to Congress and pardoned by George H.W. Bush, a man who should be serving consecutive life prison terms for crimes against humanity, now dredged up as a "special envoy" to Venezuela — shows what Trump, Bolton and Pompeo intend.

The revival of rightwing rule in the strategic countries of Argentina, Colombia and especially Brazil have given the discredited neoconservative militarists a new opportunity to rule the continent — with the approval of half if not more of the Congressional Democrats. In Brazil, the election of the near-fascist Jair Bolsonaro followed the coup-like impeachment of president Dilma Rousseff — one of the very few top-level Brazilian politicians not accused of corrupt personal enrichment — and the highly dubious conviction and imprisonment of former president Lula da Silva, the likely winner if he'd been allowed to run.

Democratic processes in Honduras and especially Brazil could have offered the region and Venezuela a ray of hope. Now only a popular and international outcry against the imperialist scenario may halt the slide toward the worst possible outcome.

Why a World of Insecurity?

There are urgent and powerful lessons to learn here. "Security" for the peoples of the United States and the world does not grow from border walls, or from expeditionary military interventions, or from sponsoring coups, fake elections and civil wars in countries considered to be "vital to America's strategic interests." Those interests themselves are at the heart of the problem.

The internal war erupting between Trump and the U.S. intelligence and security services illustrates how a system generates disasters it can't solve. Trump, who unilaterally withdrew from the nuclear agreement with Iran, insists that the Iranian regime has violated the deal. The intelligence and nuclear weapons control experts point out that it hasn't. They do, however, state that North Korea has no intention of relinquishing its nuclear weapons. No, says Trump, that threat ended when he and Kim Jong-un "fell in love."

There was "*no collusion*," bellows the president, between Russia and Trump's 2016 election campaign, as mountains of evidence to the contrary pile up. ISIS "has been defeated" in Syria, claims the White House, while U.S. military intelligence estimates that twenty or thirty thousand jihadist fighters remain on the ground.

After 40 years of externally manipulated war in Afghanistan and 17 years of the United States' invasion, the U.S. military cannot stay there, nor can it leave without generating yet another security "vacuum" and chaos.

The most ominous present development, coming at the same time as Trump's imaginary "national emergency," is a

very real global emergency and the United States' rapidly escalating drive toward war with Iran. At the Warsaw meeting where John Bolton and Mike Pompeo attempted unsuccessfully to whip European nations into line behind U.S. policy, Israel's prime minister Netanyahu let the snarling cat out of the bag when he "told Israeli media that Arab states and Israel are coming together in order to advance the common interest of war with Iran." (Trita Parsi, MiddleEastEye.org, February 15, 2019)

Netanyahu posted this "war" message in Hebrew, evidently thinking the rest of the world wouldn't notice. He later changed the wording on his Twitter account. While Washington's demands that U.S. allies withdraw from the Iran nuclear deal fell flat, every sign indicates that the United States will engage in continual provocations to create a pretext to attack.

While many previous threats have been more rhetoric than real menace, the present moment has the feel of the 2003 buildup to the U.S. invasion of Iraq – aggravated by the subjective factor of a U.S. president who's besieged at home and unhinged from reality.

From Venezuela and Central America to Palestine, Yemen and Afghanistan, and from mass refugee detention camps at the U.S-Mexican border to the disaster facing furloughed federal workers and contractors who will never get their lost pay – people pay the price for ruling elites' criminal mischief. Capitalism and imperialism create a world of insecurity, at home and abroad, for people and for the planet.

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