

Selected articles (May 1, 2020)

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1a)

UNAC Webinar: The Prosecution of Julian Assange and the Fight for Free Speech

April 19, 2020

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mv5Casy8yu0>

"Panel Speakers:

Margaret Kimberley, Senior Columnist & Editor, Black Agenda Report

Jim Lafferty, Executive Director for three decades, National Lawyers Guild, Los Angeles

Joe Lombardo, National Coordinator, United National Antiwar Coalition

Nathan Fuller, Executive Director, Courage Foundation

Nozomi Hayase, author, contributor to the new book, In Defense of Julian Assange

Moderator: Jeff Mackler, author, Obama's National Security State: The Meaning of the Edward Snowden Revelations"

1b)

ASSANGE EXTRADITION: Hearing Put Off Until July or November Because of Virus

By Joe Lauria

April 27, 2020

<https://consortiumnews.com/2020/04/27/assange-extradition-hearing-put-off-until-july-or-november-because-of-virus/>

"The judge will decide on May 4 whether to resume Assange's hearing in July or as late as November, when the first court dates are open. [...]"

1c)

ASSANGE EXTRADITION: Espionage Act Reform Bill Would Protect Journalists Like Julian Assange

By Kevin Gosztola

April 26, 2020

<https://consortiumnews.com/2020/04/26/assange-extradition-espionage-act-reform-bill-would-protect-journalists-like-julian-assange/>

"Under legislation proposed in Congress, the United States government would not be able to prosecute journalists such as WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange who publish classified information.

Democratic Senator Ron Wyden and Representative Ro Khanna introduced the Espionage Act Reform Act to reaffirm "First Amendment protections for journalists" and ensure "whistleblowers can effectively report waste, fraud, and abuse to Congress." [...]"

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2)

Sanctions Kill Webinar — Saturday May 9, 2020

<https://uspeacecouncil.org/sanctions-kill-webinar-saturday-may-9-2020/>

"Speakers include:

Venezuela — Carlos J. Ron Martinez, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs

Syria — Dr. Bashar Ja'afari, Syrian Ambassador to the United Nations

Nicaragua — Francisco O Campbell, Nicaraguan Ambassador to the US

Cuba — Representative

Zimbabwe — Representative

The US has imposed economic sanctions against 39 countries. In many cases, this denies them access to medicine and medical equipment as well as access to world markets for food and other necessities. During the coronavirus crisis the US, with the highest death count in the world, has upped the sanctions against countries like Iran and Venezuela, and has tried to weaponize COVID-19 to bring down governments that will not follow the dictates of Washington and Wall Street.

The UN has asked that sanctions be loosened during this crisis but the US has done the opposite. Many US allies have broken with them and sent medical aid to some of these countries. Now is an important time for the people in the US to come out strongly against these sanctions, which are simply war by other means.”

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3a)

America's Super-Rich See Their Wealth Rise by \$282 Billion in Three Weeks of Pandemic

America's billionaires have accrued more wealth in the past three weeks alone than they made in total prior to 1980.

By Alan Macleod

April 27, 2020

<https://www.mintpressnews.com/super-rich-see-wealth-rise-282-billion-three-weeks-coronavirus/267027/>

„[...] Billionaires very theatrically donate a fraction of what they used to give back in taxes, making sure to generate maximum publicity for their actions. And they secure positive coverage of themselves by stepping in to keep influential news organizations afloat. A December investigation by MintPress found that Gates had donated over \$9 million to The Guardian, over \$3 million to NBC Universal, over \$4.5 million to NPR, \$1 million to Al-Jazeera, and a staggering \$49 million to the BBC's Media Action program. Some, like Bezos, prefer to simply outright purchase news organizations themselves, changing the editorial stance to unquestioning loyalty to their new owners. [...]"

3b)

Billionaire Bonanza 2020. Wealth Windfalls, Tumbling Taxes, and Pandemic Profiteers

By Chuck Collins, Omar Ocampo, Sophia Paslaski

Institute for Policy Studies

April 23, 2020

<https://inequality.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Billionaire-Bonanza-2020-April-21.pdf>

„[...] Key Findings

- *Between 1990 and 2020, U.S. billionaire wealth soared 1,130 percent in 2020 dollars, an increase more than 200 times greater than the 5.37 percent growth of U.S. median wealth over this same period.*
- *Between 1980 and 2018, the tax obligations of America's billionaires, measured as a percentage of their wealth, decreased 79 percent.*
- *Between January 1, 2020 and April 10, 2020, 34 of the nation's wealthiest 170 billionaires have seen their wealth increase by tens of millions of dollars. Eight of these billionaires — Jeff Bezos (Amazon), MacKenzie Bezos (Amazon), Eric Yuan (Zoom), Steve Ballmer (Microsoft), John Albert Sobrato (Silicon*

Valley real estate), Elon Musk (Tesla and SpaceX), Joshua Harris (Apollo Global Management), and Rocco Commisso (Mediacom) — have seen their net worth surge by over \$1 billion.

- The Jeff Bezos wealth surge is unprecedented in modern financial history and varies greatly day by day. As of April 15, his fortune had increased by an estimated \$25 billion since January 1, 2020. This is larger than the Gross Domestic Product of Honduras, \$23.9 billion in 2018.

- Billionaire wealth rebounded quickly after the 2008 financial crisis, taking less than 30 months to attain its pre-meltdown levels. Between 2010 and 2020, U.S. billionaire wealth increased 80.6 percent in 2020 dollars, more than five times the median wealth increase of 15.1 percent for U.S. households over the 2010 to 2016 years, based on most recent available data.

- The billionaire share of America's increased wealth has risen throughout the past four decades. Between 2006 and 2018, nearly 7 percent of the real increase in America's wealth went to the country's 400 wealthiest households. [...]"

„[...] Introduction

In the United States and globally, these have become the “Billionaire Years.” Billionaires dominate our politics, culture, and economy. Our media hail their philanthropic gestures and treat their utterings as the pronouncements of modern-day monarchs. Each January, these royals assemble in Davos, dropped down from the skies in thousands of private jets.

We have watched billionaires deploy their wealth for political purposes and buy their way onto presidential debate stages. Two billionaire candidates for the Democratic presidential nomination spent more than \$1.2 billion in quixotic runs for our nation's highest office.¹ Other members of America's top 0.1 percent wield enormous influence down ballot in U.S. congressional races and state races.

We have also watched the expansion of billionaire philanthropy and the mushrooming of private foundations and donor-advised funds. Philanthropy in the United States has become increasingly “top heavy,” with almost all the growth in giving over the past 15 years coming from the super-rich. This growth masks a troubling trend: Donations by low-income and middle-income givers have been steadily declining.

This spring, in the face of a global pandemic, headlines are trumpeting the beneficence of billionaires who are donating what amounts to as little as 0.00001 percent of their fortunes to help their fellow humans in need. Forbes magazine has even created an online tracker to record the billionaire “agents of change” and their seemingly selfless acts.²

Meanwhile, the hidden wealth problem grows as billionaires pay millions to the Wealth Defense Industry — an army of lawyers, accountants, and wealth managers — to hide their collective trillions. Our global billionaire class, by one estimate, has hidden over \$21 trillion in offshore tax havens, trusts, and shell companies.³ [...]"

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4)

Creating the enemies they need: US militarism's strange bedfellows

By Danny Sjijsen

April 23, 2020

<https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2020/04/23/creating-the-enemies-they-need-us-militarisms-strange-bedfellows/>

„Listen to America’s imperial proconsuls long enough and they often let slip something approaching truth — perhaps exceptionalist confession is more accurate. Take Admiral Craig S. Faller, commander of U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM), with responsibility for all of Latin America. Just before the COVID-19 crisis shifted into full gear, on March 11 he testified before the House Armed Services Committee and admitted, “There will be an increase in the U.S. military presence in the hemisphere later this year.” Naturally, admiral, but why? Well, if one can push past the standard, mindless military dialectics — i.e. “bad guys” — the admiral posits a ready justification: Russia and (most especially) China. With his early career molded in the last, triumphalist Reagan-era Cold War, Faller may be a true believer in new dichotomies that must feel like coming home for the 1983 Naval Academy graduate. Before the committee, he described China, Russia, Iran, Cuba, and Venezuela as “malign state actors” who constitute “a vicious circle of threats.” Faller is right about the circle, but it is his own country that produces it. [...]“

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5a)

US REWARDS FOR HEZBOLLAH LEADERS’ HEADS: HOW DO THEY AFFECT THE ORGANISATION?

by Elijah J. Magnier

April 22, 2020

<https://ejmagnier.com/2020/04/22/us-rewards-for-hezbollah-leaders-heads-how-do-they-affect-the-organisation/>

„The US government offers financial rewards to those who help arrest a Hezbollah leader or who reveal details of their activities that enable the US to disrupt them. These rewards vary from five to ten million dollars. Thus far, no one has been able to obtain a single dollar of these awards from the US administration since 1985, when Hezbollah officially came into existence in Lebanon. How are the organisation and its leaders affected by these tempting millions offered by Washington?[...]“

5b)

ISRAEL AND HEZBOLLAH: CONFIRMATION OF DETERRENCE POLICY

By Elijah J. Magnier

April 23, 2020

<https://ejmagnier.com/2020/04/23/israel-and-hezbollah-confirmation-of-deterrence-policy/>

„The Israeli leadership has not tired of trying to change the Rules of Engagement (ROE) with Hezbollah since its defeat in the 2006 war, in the hope of eliminating the organisation that rose to state level in military capabilities (and medical skills, as it showed its preparations to confront the emerging COVID-19 virus). Israel has tried to hit targets inside Syria to stop convoys coming into Lebanon loaded with advanced weapons. However, Israel, after pursuing a non-provocation policy with Hezbollah for many years, decided to improvise and attempt a sneak attack on Beirut with drones, in the hope of introducing a new ROE and hitting Hezbollah targets. Hezbollah, however, returned the Israeli attempt by creating another balance of deterrence, embarrassing and ridiculing Israel and its army. But that, it seems, did not deter Israel, which was searching for methods to break the existing Rules of Engagement. The breach

came on the northern border. Did the tension bring a large-scale escalation between Israel and Hezbollah any closer? [...]“

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6a)

Exclusive: OPCW insiders slam ‘compromised’ new Syria chemical weapons probe

Current and former staff members of the OPCW have denounced the organization’s IIT report alleging Syrian government sarin use at Ltamenah, criticizing its reliance on rumor, hearsay, “scientifically flawed” claims and the influence of unqualified, secret “experts” aligned with the Western-backed opposition.

By OPCW Insiders

April 28, 2020

<https://thegrayzone.com/2020/04/28/opcw-insiders-ltamenah-chemical-weapons-report/>

„[...] We have read the first Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) April 2020 report on alleged chemical attacks at Ltamenah. We observe that, as expected, the IIT has been loyal to its raison d’être. This has gone on for too long now. What makes it worse is the IIT’s narrative has been presented to the world as a product of many peoples’ work.

In fact, a number of impartial and principled professionals no longer wish to be associated with the politically motivated reports being issued by the OPCW FFM and now the IIT. Many consider this work and these reports to be procedurally and scientifically flawed. Some of us believe they should not be seen as representing the work of OPCW inspectors at all.

The recent publication of the IIT report into alleged chemical attacks at Ltamenah on March 24, 25 and 30 2017, has highlighted again the misuse of the OPCW by influential state parties to further their political and foreign affairs objectives. It was very clear to us during the creation and setup of the IIT that its intent was not to investigate alleged incidents of chemical attacks in Syria. Instead, the team was created simply to find the Syrian government guilty of chemical attacks. Its credibility was therefore compromised from its inception, and anyone who still thinks differently is either uninformed or naïve. This first report of the IIT has clearly reinforced this fact. [...]“

6b)

OPCW’s Own Scientists Say OPCW Is Now Just a U.S.-Propaganda Agency

By Eric Zuesse

April 29, 2020

<https://thesaker.is/opcws-own-scientists-say-opcw-is-now-just-a-u-s-propaganda-agency/>

„[...] And, now, following, are the news-reports that describe the events building up to the “OPCW Insiders” statement, that “Some of us believe they should not be seen as representing the work of OPCW inspectors at all” (these events will be listed starting with the latest, and working backwards in time, to the earliest): [...]“

6c)

Syrian Resistance to the US Occupation Escalates

By Steven Sahiounie

April 29, 2020

<https://www.globalresearch.ca/syrian-resistance-us-occupation-escalates/5711186>

„[...] As the US armored vehicles left Qamishli in October, the locals threw rocks and rotten vegetables at them. The US had ditched its local allies, in favor of oil revenues. ISIS was no longer an enemy, and the Kurdish militia was no longer a partner. Now, six months after the US pullout of the northeast of Syria, the US forces are confronted by angry locals, deadly attacks, and the COVID-19 virus. It appears the days of the US illegal occupation of Syria are numbered. [...]“

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7a)

IRAQ FACING A GREAT US THREAT: CHINA, AL-HASHD AND IRAN OUT, OR ELSE ... (1/2)

By Elijah J. Magnier

April 25, 2020

<https://ejmagnier.com/2020/04/25/iraq-facing-a-great-us-threat-china-al-hashd-and-iran-out-or-else-1-2/>

„[...] Washington blatantly dictated its demands to the Iraqi officials: to rescind all signed agreements with China, disband the PMF by fragmenting its brigades, and integrate these into the existing security apparatus (Ministry of Defence and Interior Ministry). The US wanted its harsh sanctions to be applied on Iran and that Mesopotamia should shut its gates on the “Islamic Republic” to force Tehran to fall into the arms of the US and thereby acknowledge its dominance. Finally, Washington wanted the Iraqi parliament to overturn its previous decision to withdraw US forces from the country, as we have said, a decision taken largely because of the assassination of Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis Major General Qassim Soleimani, at Baghdad Airport. [...]“

7b)

IRAQ FACING A GREAT US THREAT: CHINA, AL-HASHD AND IRAN OUT, OR ELSE! ... (2/2)

By Elijah J. Magnier

April 26, 2020

<https://ejmagnier.com/2020/04/26/iraq-facing-a-great-us-threat-china-al-hashd-and-iran-out-or-else-2-2/>

„[...] The US is supporting Iraqi Kurdistan by expanding its “Harir” military base and establishing another large military base on the border with Iran. The message to Baghdad seems blunt: US forces will remain in the face of resistance from those parts of Iraq more subject to Baghdad’s authority. In Kurdistan, the central government authority is not as effective as in other parts of the country. The US supports the Kurdish Peshmerga and arms them through its allies, the United Arab Emirates, who are providing the Kurdish armed men with weaponry: four cargos full of weapons landed recently in Erbil.

It is not excluded, if Trump remains in power, that his administration will help the Kurdistan region detach itself from Iraq, as it may also support a Kurdish secession attempt in north-eastern Syria. In the part of Syria, the US is occupying with Kurdish help, US forces are stealing Syrian crude oil- even if its price is no longer sufficient to pay the expenses of the troops deployed around it- indicating that there is another reason for their presence, related to the US ally, Israel. [...]"

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8a)

COVID-19: 'It's the System, Stupid!' Black Alliance for Peace

By Black Alliance for Peace

April 29, 2020

<https://www.globalresearch.ca/covid-19-its-the-system-stupid-black-alliance-for-peace/5711051>

„[...] While some U.S. lives may have been saved during the COVID-19 pandemic through a quicker and more coordinated action plan, the objective fact remains no plan could have been successfully implemented because a developed public healthcare infrastructure does not exist. Years of neoliberal austerity and privatization gutted public investment in healthcare for rural and urban working-class communities and led to thousands of hospital closings over the last few decades, decimating the already weak U.S. public healthcare system.

That, as well as capitalist environmental racism—where toxic industrial processing plants, waste dumps and pollutants from industrial agricultural operations produced the so-called “underlying conditions” of cancers, asthma and a whole host of upper-respiratory illnesses—translated into death sentences for many poor and working-class Africans.

Yet, the focus on Trump’s personality has shifted attention away from the structural violence of capitalist oppression and exploitation. In fact, it is not just Trump, but most of the capitalist class, pushing for a return to “normal.” That class consensus was reflected in opinion pieces and commentary in bourgeois rags ranging from the New York Times to the Wall Street Journal. While it was not openly echoed by Democratic congressional representatives, it helps to explain why the Democrats went along with the measly \$1,200 checks to workers. Those insufficient payments help to keep people desperate and ready to return to work, even if it means jeopardizing their health. [...]"

8b)

Perspectives on the Pandemic | Dr. John Ioannidis Update: 4.17.20 | Episode 4

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cwPgmLoZA4s&feature=emb_title

„In this long-awaited follow-up to his interview in late March, Dr. John Ioannidis discusses the results of three preliminary studies, (including his latest, which shows a drastically reduced infection fatality rate); the worrisome effects of the lockdown; the Swedish approach; the Italian data; the ups and downs of testing; the feasibility of “contact tracing”, and much more. [...]"

8c)

trustWHO Filmmakers Respond to Vimeo Censorship

April 17, 2020

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=194&v=VjQGyqVN5RM&feature=emb_title

„A message from Oval Media, producers of Trust WHO: A few days ago, Vimeo deleted “trustWHO”, directed by Lilian Franck, from their platform, stating that they do not support “Videos that depict or encourage self-harm, falsely claim that mass tragedies are hoaxes, or perpetuate false or misleading claims about vaccine safety.”

This claim about our documentary is both misleading and false. “trustWHO” has been thoroughly researched for 7 years; it has been fact-checked and approved by lawyers, experts in the medical field and even by key executives of the WHO itself.

The documentary simply investigates how efficiency and transparency of the World Health Organization are undermined by both corporate influences and a lack of public funding. It is a journalistic investigation based on facts - and far from what Vimeo makes it out to be. This is our full statement on the matter, presented by Robert Cibis (Filmmaker, Co-author and producer of “trustWHO”). [...]

8d)

The Farce and Diabolical Agenda of A “Universal Lockdown”

By Peter Koenig

April 27, 2020

<https://www.globalresearch.ca/covid-19-cruelty-universal-lockdown/5710798>

„First comes the farce, an (almost) universal government lie around the globe about a deadly virus, WHO named COVID-19. The decision for a global lockdown – literally for the collapse of the world economy – was already taken at the WEF conference in Davos, 21 – 24 January 2020. On January 30, WHO declared COVID-19 a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC). At that time, there were only 150 known COVID-19 cases outside of China. No reason whatsoever to declare a pandemic. On March 11, Dr. Tedros, DG of WHO converted the PHEIC into a pandemic. This gave green light for the start of implementing “The Plan”. The pandemic was needed as a pretext to halt and collapse the world economy and the underlying social fabric. [...]

8e)

Operation COVID-19: Testing the Degree of “People’s Submission”. Activating our “Paranoia Switches”...

By Dr. Pascal Sacré

April 27, 2020

<https://www.globalresearch.ca/operation-covid-19-testing-the-degree-of-peoples-submission-activating-our-paranoia-switches/5710869>

„We are in a world that is globally flabbergasted today. In other words, stunned, panicked. Our brains are in a state of excessive, inordinate paranoia. Our paranoia switches have been activated! Martha Stout, an American psychologist, describes this in her book, “The Paranoia Switch“, published in 2007. Our paranoia switch had already been activated on September 11, 2001. [...]“

8f)

Facts about Covid-19

<https://swprs.org/a-swiss-doctor-on-covid-19/>

„[...] Below you will find regular, but not daily, updates on medical and political developments. [...]“

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9a)

Right-Wing Think Tanks Are Using Covid-19 To Push War with Iran

The Foundation for Defense of Democracies and American Enterprise Institute are aggressively campaigning for military escalation and a tightening of sanctions.

By Sarah Lazare

April 27, 2020

<http://inthesetimes.com/article/22487/think-tanks-fdd-aei-iran-sanctions-coronavirus-war-trump-pompeo-covid>

„Since the global Covid-19 pandemic began, a cluster of U.S. think tanks has been aggressively lobbying the Trump administration to escalate militarily toward Iran and tighten U.S. sanctions. This push has come despite warnings that such sanctions are worsening the death toll of Iran’s outbreak, which is one of the worst in the world. The think tanks leading this effort—the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD) and American Enterprise Institute (AEI)—have cranked out non-stop statements, research documents, videos and media appearances since the crisis began. They are not shouting into the wind, but speaking directly to an administration that has proven willing to act upon their words. [...]“

9b)

The Urgent Need for a U.S.-Iran Hotline

Naval incidents in the Gulf have spotlighted the danger that a U.S.-Iranian skirmish could blow up into war. The two sides have little ability to communicate at present. They should hasten to design a military-to-military channel to lower the chances of inadvertent conflagration.

The International Crisis Group

April 23, 2020

<https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/iran/b77-urgent-need-us-iran-hotline>

9c)

Have Iran's space ambitions taken a worrisome new turn?

By Fabian Hinz

April 24, 2020

<https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/commentary/have-irans-space-ambitions-taken-a-worrisome-new-turn/>

„On 22 April, Iran successfully launched its first military satellite, Noor, using the new Qased Space Launch Vehicle (SLV). With the launch of the Qased, Iran has unveiled its parallel space program run by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard's Corps (IRGC) for the first time. While fears about Iran's previous space launches serving as cover for ICBM development have been vastly overblown, there are strong indications that Iran's emerging IRGC track does indeed represent a hedging strategy aimed at acquiring long-range ballistic missile technology. [...]“

9d)

A Roadmap to Pragmatic Dialogue on the Iranian Missile Programme

By Fabian Hinz

European Leadership Network; Policy Brief

March 6, 2020

<https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/policy-brief/a-roadmap-to-pragmatic-dialogue-on-the-iranian-missile-program/>

<https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Fabian-Hinz-ELN-Iran-Missile-Policy-March-2019.pdf>

„As European governments push for negotiations to restrain Iran's missile programme, a new ELN policy brief assesses its missile developments, analysing which capabilities Iran deems vital, which it could limit, and recommends how European negotiators could achieve a deal. [...]“

9e)

Iran in the Corona Era: Implications for Israel's National Security

The Institute for National Security Studies (Israel)

April 20, 2020

<https://www.inss.org.il/event/iran-coronavirus/>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MdyhqdYH_Lc&feature=emb_title

„INSS held a ZOOM-based discussion on “Iran in the Corona Era: Implications for Israel's National Security.” [...]“

9f)

Iranian Regime Circles Criticize Supreme Leader Khamenei: Release The Billions Of Dollars In Funds You Control To The Desperate Iranian Public

MEMRI

April 23, 2020

<https://www.memri.org/reports/iranian-regime-circles-criticize-supreme-leader-khamenei-release-billions-dollars-funds-you>

„In the past weeks, Iran has been pressing the international community for financial aid to help it deal with the spread of the coronavirus pandemic in the country. In March 2020 Iran appealed to the International Monetary Fund for a \$5 billion emergency loan to fight the virus. On April 7, Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei approved President Hassan Rouhani's request of a \$1 billion withdrawal from the National Development Fund of Iran for the fight against the pandemic. The fund, established in 2011, holds Iran's foreign reserves estimated at approximately \$90 billion, obtained from the country's oil and gas exports.[...]"

9g)

DONALD TRUMP THREATENS TO 'SHOOT DOWN AND DESTROY' IRAN SHIPS AMID TENSIONS IN PERSIAN GULF

By Tom O'Connor

April 22, 2020

<https://www.newsweek.com/donald-trump-threatens-shoot-down-destroy-iran-ships-amid-tensions-persian-gulf-1499445>

„President Donald Trump has instructed the U.S. military to use force against armed Iranian vessels that have recently engaged in tensions with the Navy's Fifth Fleet in the Persian Gulf. "I have instructed the United States Navy to shoot down and destroy any and all Iranian gunboats if they harass our ships at sea," Trump tweeted Wednesday. [...]"

9h)

Iranian Breakout Estimates and Enriched Uranium Stocks

By David Albright and Sarah Burkhard

The Institute for Science and International Security

April 21, 2020

<https://isis-online.org/isis-reports/detail/iranian-breakout-estimates-and-enriched-uranium-stocks#fn1>

[https://isis-online.org/uploads/isis-reports/documents/Breakout and LEU stocks April 21%2C 2020 final.pdf](https://isis-online.org/uploads/isis-reports/documents/Breakout_and_LEU_stocks_April_21%2C_2020_final.pdf)

„In light of a recent U.S. State Department arms control compliance report highlighting Iran’s growing “uranium enrichment activities and stockpile of enriched uranium,” this report presents recent Iranian breakout estimates and compares them to pivotal historical ones, where breakout is defined as the time Iran would need to produce 25 kilograms of weapon-grade uranium (WGU), enough for a nuclear weapon. As of late February 2020, the breakout estimate is 3.8 months, with a range of 3.1 to 4.6 months. This estimate is based on an Institute breakout calculator, utilizing modified ideal cascade calculations, adjusted with results from an earlier multi-year program of complex computer simulations of Iranian breakout, conducted in collaboration with centrifuge experts at the University of Virginia, and supplemented by operational data on Iranian centrifuges. The breakout estimates result from Iran’s installed enrichment capacity and its stock of low enriched uranium (LEU), as reported by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in its quarterly reports on Iran. A significant development is that Iran is at the threshold of having enough LEU to move from a four-step enrichment process to a three-step one, allowing a significant reduction of breakout times, a phenomenon referred to in the media as a “key threshold” or “enough LEU for a nuclear weapon.” A potential covert enrichment plant utilizing 3000 IR-2m centrifuges is also assessed, giving a breakout of 3.1 months. The Annex to this report contains a summary of Iran’s stock of low enriched uranium, based on the IAEA’s most recent quarterly report on Iran, summarizing the situation as of late February 2020 and identifying which of the LEU stocks are used in the breakout calculations.[...]“

9i)

Economic sanctions and Iran’s capacity to respond to COVID-19

By Adrianna Murphy, Zhaleh Abdi, Iraj Harirchi, Martin McKee, Elham Ahmadnezhad

The Lancet

April 6, 2020

<https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S2468-2667%2820%2930083-9>

„[...] Even before COVID-19, Iran’s health system was feeling the effect of the sanctions.³ Their impact is now severe because they restrict the government’s ability to raise funds or to import essential goods. Of the ten countries with the highest number of recorded cases of COVID-19 to date, Iran is the poorest.² In 2019, Iran had the lowest rate of economic growth (–9.5%) and highest rate of inflation (35.7%) recorded in the country for the past 20 years. This financial situation makes the funding of adequate prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of COVID-19 impossible, and the country cannot take the same measures adopted in other countries to strengthen responses, such as paying the full cost of obtaining treatment.³ Essential medicines and medical equipment are technically exempt from sanctions, but their availability is restricted by the effect of sanctions on the commercial sector, reducing manufacturing and trade capacity, and on foreign exchange. Consequently, although approximately 184 000 hospital and primary health-care staff are working to fight COVID-19, their efforts are thwarted by shortages of test kits, protective equipment, and ventilators. [...]“

9j)

How a misleading report on Iran from a hawkish ‘think tank’ made its way to Trump administration talking points

By Gareth Smyth

April 22, 2020

<https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2020/04/22/how-a-misleading-report-on-iran-from-a-fdd-trump-administration-talking-points/>

„Whatever pain COVID-19 inflicts, it offers a golden opportunity for Washington lobbyists committed to tough sanctions against Iran. ‘Regime change’ or ‘regime collapse’, they say, is now within grasp if only the United States stands firm. United States sanctions have not just spawned a proliferating industry profiting lawyers, bureaucrats and “expert” consultants. They have created an opaque maze around which “bullet points” bounce from lobby groups and “think tanks” to the media to government, becoming “facts” through repetition and circular sourcing. Leading the Iran intervention lobby is the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD). Its CEO Mark Dubowitz is tireless on Twitter and in the media. As the pandemic helps blur any line between opinion and facts, FDD can more easily market its paid advocates as “experts” purportedly moved solely by evidence. On April 5, FDD published a “research memo” entitled “Should the United States Lift Sanctions on Iran to Address Its Coronavirus Outbreak?” The answer, unsurprisingly, was no. [...]“

9k)

Should the United States Lift Sanctions on Iran to Address Its Coronavirus Outbreak?

Memo

Foundation for Defense of Democracies

April 5, 2020

„Iran is the epicenter of the coronavirus outbreak in the Middle East. The Islamic Republic’s leadership has engaged in a massive campaign aimed at lifting sanctions imposed on it for its malign activities, claiming sanctions hinder efforts to address the COVID-19 public health crisis. This memo, however, assesses that lifting sanctions would be ill-advised. The Iranian population suffering from COVID-19 deserves much needed medical assistance but that should be funded through reliable NGOs, bypassing the regime and not through the transfer of funds to the regime, which has ample financial resources estimated at over \$300 billion for economic stimulus and humanitarian aid. [...]“

<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2020/04/05/should-the-united-states-lift-sanctions-on-iran-to-address-its-coronavirus-outbreak/>

<https://www.fdd.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/fdd-memo-should-the-united-states-lift-sanctions-on-iran-to-address-its-coronavirus-outbreak.pdf>

9l)

Iran's Post-JCPOA Transit Initiatives in Central Asia

As a post-JCPOA implication, Iran has followed 4 transit initiatives in Central Asia including “Persian Railway Corridor”, “East Caspian Railway”, so-called “Ashgabat Agreement” and “Iran-Kazakhstan-China Corridor” more seriously.

By Omid Rahimi

April 18, 2020

<https://parsipolicy.com/en/news/2868>

9m)

Why Iran's Zarif accused Trump of promoting 'Saddam's terrorists'

Chief Iranian diplomat denounced Trump for retweeting MEK-linked account

By Ali Harb

23 April 23,2020

<https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/why-iran-zarif-accused-trump-supporting-saddam-terrorists>

„Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on Thursday accused US President Donald Trump of making threats that were cheered on by "Saddam's terrorists". The chief Iranian diplomat was referring to the formerly US-designated terrorist group Mujahideen-e Khalq (MEK), an Iranian opposition group that was allied with the late Iraqi autocrat Saddam Hussein. [...]"

9n)

SANCTIONS AND SICKNESS

By Vira Ameli

April 1, 2020

<https://newleftreview.org/issues/II122/articles/vira-ameli-sanctions-and-sickness>

„[...] The politicization of the coronavirus pandemic—and other crises—in the Islamic Republic is, of course, interwoven with campaigns for regime change. Lobbies like United Against Nuclear Iran, which have long pressed for ever tougher sanctions, have in recent months singled out pharmaceutical sales to the country, targeting the Western companies still trading with Iran. There was a chorus of indignation

when Iran rejected the offer from Médecins sans frontières of a 50-bed field hospital, ignoring the fact that its co-founder, onetime French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner, has for the past three years addressed and endorsed the so-called 'Free Iran' gatherings of the mek—the 'People's Mujahedin of Iran', a cult dedicated to violent regime change which, following the fall of its previous patron Saddam Hussein is currently stationed in Albania. In viewing the covid-19 pandemic through the prism of international power politics, Western governments, political observers and media pundits have not only failed to comprehend the facts on the ground; they have missed opportunities to learn from Iran's experience—both what the country got right in responding to the pandemic, and what it got wrong—that could have benefited their own populations, in a world that today is interdependent not only economically and culturally, but perhaps above all in matters of public health."

9o)

How Iran Fights the Coronavirus and the U.S.: Sanctioned, Alone, but Still More Efficient

By Ivan KESIĆ

April 22, 2020

<https://www.strategic-culture.org/news/2020/04/22/how-iran-fights-coronavirus-and-us-sanctioned-alone-but-still-more-efficient/>

„[...] Iran reported its first confirmed cases of SARS-CoV-2 infections on 19 February 2020 in the city of Qom, probably brought to the country by merchants who had travelled to China, and in the following days became a center of the spread of the virus in the region, as well as the second-worst affected country in the world. In the first week of March, Iran reported dozens of dead and hundreds infected each day, next only to China as the pandemic's epicenter. At the same time, the government closed schools, universities, shopping centers, bazaars, holy shrines, and cancelled public events and festival celebrations. As confirmed cases mounted, health ministry announced that checkpoints would be placed between cities to limit travel. The unprecedented situation has left Iran in need of masks, respirators and other medical equipment, but imports are virtually impossible due to unilateral U.S. trade sanctions. [...]“

9p)

TRUMP RETWEETED PRAISE FROM AN ANTI-IRAN HARD-LINER WHO DOESN'T EXIST

By Murtaza Hussain

April 22 2020

<https://theintercept.com/2020/04/22/trump-heshmat-alavi-twitter-mek/>

„ON WEDNESDAY MORNING, just a few hours after once again threatening to go to war with Iran, President Donald Trump shared a tweet from an account from someone by the name of Heshmat Alavi. Like many of the tweets the president circulates, Alavi was praising Trump, this time for his hard-line stance against the Islamic Republic. Trump's amplification of the post was bad enough on its own: Alavi is a supporter of a militant Iranian cult called the Mojahedin-e-Khalq, known as the MEK, an

organization that was designated for decades as a terrorist organization and is widely hated inside Iran. What makes it even worse, however, is that Heshmat Alavi does not exist. [...]"

9q)

DEFECTORS TELL OF TORTURE AND FORCED STERILIZATION IN MILITANT IRANIAN CULT

By Murtaza Hussain, Matthew Cole

March 22 2020

<https://theintercept.com/2020/03/22/mek-mojahedin-e-khalq-iran/>

„ON A BLISTERINGLY hot summer afternoon in 2006, Reza Sadeghi ran into an old friend at the Iraqi headquarters of the Mojahedin-e Khalq, an exiled Iranian militant group better known as the MEK. The two men had not seen each other in over a decade. Sadeghi guided his friend, who had just arrived from Canada, on a stroll through the desert compound known as Camp Ashraf. He was glad to catch up with an old comrade. But he also had a burning question. Sadeghi had effectively given his life to the MEK, which means “People’s Mujahideen of Iran.” A 26-year veteran of the group, he had not left Camp Ashraf for over a decade. During that time, he’d had no contact with his family or news of them. The MEK leadership had forced him and most of the other cadres living at Camp Ashraf to abandon even their closest relationships. Most painful for Sadeghi were thoughts of his son, Paul, his only child, now 16 years old. Sadeghi hadn’t seen or spoken to Paul since he’d arrived in Iraq. [...]"

9r)

American troops had only hours to react to Iranian ballistic missile attack. Here’s what they did.

By Shawn Snow

April 22, 2020

<https://www.militarytimes.com/flashpoints/2020/04/21/american-troops-had-only-hours-to-react-to-iranian-ballistic-missile-attack-heres-what-they-did/>

„[...] Iran launched more than a dozen missile targeting coalition troops in Iraq following a U.S. decapitation strike that killed Iranian Quds Force commander Qassem Soleimani. “Bottom line is, in my professional assessment, at Al Asad ... the points of impact were close enough to personnel and equipment and so on and so forth — I believe, based on what I saw and what I know, that they were intended to cause structural damage, destroy vehicles and aircraft, and to kill personnel,” Milley said in January. The U.S. has since sent Patriot missile batteries inside Iraq to defend coalition troops from potential Iranian strikes. [...]"

9s)

With apparently fabricated nuclear documents, Netanyahu pushed the US towards war with Iran

By Gareth Porter

April 29, 2020

<https://thegrayzone.com/2020/04/29/fabricated-nuclear-documents-netanyahu-war-iran/#more-23851>

„An investigation of supposed Iranian nuclear documents presented in a dramatically staged Netanyahu press conference indicates they were an Israeli fabrication designed to trigger US military conflict with Iran. [...]“