



PEACE CORPS

PCIA IRAN ASSOCIATION

انجمن گروه صلح ایران

PCIA ADVOCACY BULLETIN

News from Peace Corps Iran Association's Advocacy Committee
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The Cyrus Cylinder استوانه کوروش or Cyrus Charter منشور کوروش was discovered under the foundation of a Babylonian palace in 1879, making it perhaps the oldest time capsule on record. It commemorates Cyrus' victory over Babylonia in 539 BC and sets out the rights of subjects in his expanding empire. It is often commemorated as the oldest charter of human rights in the world.



One of many COVID-19 hospitals that has been created in Iran to deal with the Coronavirus pandemic. Iran's public health infrastructure has been severely challenged by the pandemic and shortages in PPE, medicines and medical equipment.

Note from the Editor

COVID-19 Challenges for the Peace Corps and for Iran

by Paul Barker

For the Peace Corps Iran community COVID -19 brings a reckoning on multiple levels. In a land whose people we came to know and count as close friends, official numbers admit that over 80,000 Iranians have been afflicted by the virus and over 5,000 have died. Some critics argue the real numbers are far higher. On another level the organization through which we served, the Peace Corps, has suspended its global operations, returned all volunteers to the US and terminated their service. This may seem as rather harsh treatment for the lowest paid employees of the federal government, and it also places the future of the Peace Corps in question.

The COVID-19 pandemic has scrambled the equations for pursuing a more productive relationship with Iran. The Iranian economy was already suffering from two years of 'maximum pressure' sanctions. The virus stressed Iran's inadequately equipped public health infrastructure. Stay at home orders and internal and external travel bans heightened unemployment and economic contraction. Hardliners in the

Trump administration apparently see COVID-19 as amplifying the impact of their maximum pressure tactics and are resistant to calls for any relaxation of sanctions to enable Iran to respond to a humanitarian catastrophe.

Iran continues to defy the pressure and expectations of the US administration. Iranian fast boats have harassed US naval ships in the Gulf of Oman. Iran continues its support of actors throughout the region.

The findings of the latest Iran Poll deserve careful study by all persons responsible for crafting and implementing US policy towards Iran. It shows an Iranian people very proud of their Iranian heritage, suffering greatly from a failing economy, blaming both their government's failings and US sanctions for their plight, favoring Iranian nuclear research and development, opposing the development of nuclear weapons, severely disillusioned by the results of diplomacy with the P5+1, yet eager to return to the framework and limits of the JCPOA if the US is willing to return to it and end the sanctions regime.

US Sanctions on Iran are a kind of siege warfare which, when coupled with a pandemic or plague, can produce devastating consequences. Pompeo's coercive sanctions-led foreign policy also applies to Venezuela where he announced a transition plan for the country and made US assistance for the coronavirus response contingent on both the Maduro and Guido factions accepting the plan.

Through an Action Alert PCIA has endorsed a joint call from The European Leadership Network (ELN) and the US-based Iran Project. Their call offers pragmatic advice on how the Trump administration could evolve its position towards Iran to both alleviate the COVID-19 humanitarian crisis and possibly create some elements of good will and trust that would make further dialogue and negotiations possible.

Action Alert: Banking Modifications for

Humanitarian Assistance for Iran

From the PCIA Advocacy Group, April 15, 2020

The PCIA Board has adopted the attached statement, "A Call for Sanctions Relief and Banking Modifications for Humanitarian Support for Iran" and distributed it to press contacts and kindred organizations.

The PCIA statement supports and urges action on the set of practical, non-partisan, largely technical steps which leaders of the Iran Project and the European

Leadership Network (ELN) recommended April 6, 2020. These leaders are former American and European senior diplomats, political leaders, health officials, and sanctions experts, including Cabinet members serving under both Republican and Democratic Presidents and a former World Health Organization Chief.

[ELN-Iran Project Press Statement of 6 April 2020.](#)

[Transcript of their April 6 press event.](#)

[Audio of their April 6 press event.](#)

The Iran Project/ELN steps are the latest in a series of calls for action to modify US sanctions to mitigate the unfolding humanitarian disaster in Iran. (See the ACTION ALERTS for March 17, 20, and 24, for some of the earlier calls for action.) Crafted by sanctions experts and diplomats, these steps, especially the first five, are more specific and technical and may be more achievable in the short term.

The further three steps would either help Iran access its own funds held in escrow accounts in countries permitted under US sanctions to import Iranian oil, or to get an International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan in order to purchase needed medical equipment and medicines or deal with the other economic disruptions stemming from the pandemic. As of April 15, the IMF has not made a decision on Iran's request for a \$5 billion loan under the IMF Rapid Financing Facility, its first request for an IMF loan since before the Iranian revolution. There are press reports that the US Administration will vote against the IMF loan. Alone, the US does not have enough voting rights to deny the loan. Reportedly, the US' European allies support Iran's request for an IMF loan.

The essential arguments remain the same for advocating changes to US sanctions and banking regulations to alleviate the COVID-19 humanitarian crisis in Iran.

1. Iran remains the epicenter of the corona virus in the Middle East, with the most cases of any country in that region, and among the top ten countries of the world in numbers of confirmed cases. As of 17:35 EDT, April 15, Iran had 76,389 confirmed cases and 4,777 deaths. [Many observers believe the true toll is much higher.](#)
- 2.
2. The US "maximum pressure" campaign of increased sanctions against Iran since the US left the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action in May 2018 have greatly burdened Iran in trying to deal with COVID-19. While trade in some humanitarian products is not sanctioned itself, the US secondary sanctions on banks, insurers, shippers, and other economic entities make it

almost impossible for Iran to import – with its own funds -- sorely needed medical equipment and medicine.

3. It is in the US national interest to help combat the pandemic in Iran and other hot spots around the world. This very contagious virus does not respect political borders and boundaries. Additionally, refugees and other persons departing Iran for Afghanistan and Iraq, two countries where the US still has a sizeable number of troops, have spread the virus to those countries.
4. There is a precedent for the US to relax sanctions against Iran during humanitarian crises. President George W Bush did so in February 2003 and President Barack Obama in August 2012, both times responding to earthquakes.
5. A humanitarian gesture by the US now to help Iran cope better with the pandemic might pay off diplomatically later if and when the US and Iran get down to discussing the nuclear agreement and other issues of contention. Such a gesture would certainly be welcomed by many Iranians.
6. Finally, and most importantly, taking these steps to alleviate suffering and prevent additional deaths is the humanitarian, the moral, the right thing to do.

Contact your Members of Congress, both in the House and the Senate, urging them to speak out, even legislate, in support of the Iran Project/ELN set of actions to modify US sanctions and banking regulations. Neither the House of Representatives nor the Senate is in session now, but news reports state legislators may come back to Washington May 4. However, they continue to work from their home state offices and homes. *If you do not know your Representative's or Senator's phone number, you can call 202-224-3121 and ask for your Representative by name. E-mail might be a better way to connect with your representatives these days.*

If your Senator is on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, it is especially important to contact him or her. These Senators sit on that committee:

Majority	Minority
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Jim Risch, Idaho, Chairman</u>• <u>Marco Rubio, Florida</u>• <u>Ron Johnson, Wisconsin</u>• <u>Cory Gardner, Colorado</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Bob Menendez, New Jersey, Ranking Member</u>• <u>Ben Cardin, Maryland</u>• <u>Jeanne Shaheen, New Hampshire</u>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Todd Young, Indiana • John Barrasso, Wyoming • Johnny Isakson, Georgia (until January 2020) • Rob Portman, Ohio • Rand Paul, Kentucky • Lindsey Graham, South Carolina • Mitt Romney, Utah • Ted Cruz, Texas • David Perdue, Georgia (from January 2020) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chris Coons, Delaware • Tom Udall, New Mexico • Chris Murphy, Connecticut • Tim Kaine, Virginia • Ed Markey, Massachusetts • Jeff Merkley, Oregon • Cory Booker, New Jersey
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Use the PCIA statement, the Iran Project/ELN steps in engaging with the media – letters to the editor, an oped, a radio interview, blog entry, FaceBook posting, etc.

After you contact your Members of Congress or engage the media, send PCIA a quick email at advocacy@peacecorpsiran.org and let us know how it went.

PCIA Statement on Facilitating Humanitarian Access

Peace Corps Iran Association calls for Sanctions Relief and Banking Modifications for Humanitarian Support for Iran

We, as members of the Peace Corps Iran Association, believe that COVID-19 is a worldwide public health crisis unlike any since 1918. For Iran, however, this health crisis is also becoming a humanitarian crisis of unprecedented scale. The humanitarian crisis is one that the US is deeply involved with causing through the maximum pressure campaign of sanctions and banking regulations. Accordingly, the US also has the power to significantly mitigate the impact of the crisis through quick and targeted political and economic actions.

Sanctions, that were largely lifted after the 2015 JCPOA and then re-imposed even more harshly in 2018, have been effective in creating severe economic hardship in Iran, as intended by the Administration.

However, sanctions often have unintended consequences. Direct and secondary sanctions on Iranian banking and commerce effectively prevent Iran from procuring with its own funds vital medical supplies and equipment required to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. In Iran today US sanctions are contributing to a humanitarian

disaster of 1918 proportions.

We add our voice to those of many others to request that the Treasury and State Departments and the Senate and House do everything in their power to immediately modify sanctions. We support and urge their action on the five action steps advocated by American and European former senior diplomats, health officials, and sanctions experts in their letter of April 6, 2020 from the Iran Project and the European Leadership Network (ELN):

1. 1. Expand the scope of humanitarian exemptions under U.S. sanctions to directly include devices and equipment necessary to effectively combat COVID-19.
2. 2. Add staffing and other resources at the US Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) to speed-up the licensing process.
3. 3. Issue comfort letters to European and other non-US banks, as well as for as many entities in the value chain as possible – such as manufacturers, shippers, and insurers – that already are conducting enhanced due diligence, in order to reassure them that they will not run afoul of OFAC if they provide a function for humanitarian trade with Iran.
4. 4. Offer regular updates on the operationalization of the US-sponsored Swiss Humanitarian Trade Arrangement (SHTA) and relax its stringent reporting requirements, which are a significant disincentive to any Swiss companies that might consider making use of the SHTA.
5. 5. Express support for humanitarian trade as facilitated through the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX) as an alternative mechanism for Europe to conduct humanitarian trade with Iran.

We further support the additional longer-term measures recommended by the Iran Project and ELN:

1. 6. Make clear to countries that were granted waivers to continue purchases of Iranian oil and that as a result are now holding significant amounts of Iranian money in escrow that those funds can be used to pay for humanitarian exports to Iran.
2. 7. Provide funding to the World Health Organization (WHO) to enable further deliveries of aid and technical assistance to Iran.
3. 8. Do not interfere if the International Monetary Fund (IMF) board votes in favor of providing Iran with requested emergency financing. A loan from the IMF would help Iran address its balance of payments crisis and pay for imported medical equipment.

Iran must be enabled to self-finance a robust response to the COVID-19 crisis. American actions which severely hamper that effort will be rightly condemned. It is

not only in America's self interest to facilitate the containment of this pandemic in Iran and other hard-hit corners of our planet, but it is also the right thing to do.

Between 1962 and 1976 over 1,700 Peace Corps Volunteers served in Iran. The Peace Corps Iran Association is composed of former PC Iran volunteers, staff and friends who share a commitment to promoting diplomacy and better relations between the Iranian and American people.

The Iran Project operates under the auspices of the nonprofit The Foundation for a Civil Society. *For two decades its team of retired diplomats and foreign policy experts has worked to address broader U.S.-Iranian tensions, improve dialogue between our two countries, and find a balanced, objective, and bipartisan approach to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon.*

The European Leadership Network (ELN) is an independent, non-partisan, pan-European NGO with a network of nearly 200 past, present and future European leaders working to provide practical real-world solutions to political and security challenges.

For more information, contact PCIA Advocacy Committee members:

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- ⇒ Carolyn Yale, PCV in Shiraz, Iran 1974-75, retired USEPA, water policy, Oakland, CA, Phone 510-325-5005, carolyn@peacecorpsiran.org
- ⇒ Brad Hanson, PCV in Khwaf and Shiraz 1973-76, retired diplomat, Falls Church, VA, phone 678-640-4834, brad@peacecorpsiran.org

COVID-19

Vira Ameli: [Sanctions and Sickness](#), 1/4/2020

Instituted during the 1980–88 war with Iraq, the [public health] system was later described by the WHO as an 'incredible masterpiece'.¹ Orchestrated in a pyramid structure with an efficient referral system, its achievements have been remarkable: universal immunization; dramatic reductions in maternal and infant-mortality rates; effective family planning and population control. Strategic advances in responsiveness, equity and universality were focused on continuously monitoring the population's needs and modifying service-delivery systems to meet them. Among the public-health gains was 'the most rapid decline in birth-rates in world history', from an average of seven to two children per mother by the end of the century—'a demographic transition of immense proportions'.

Currently, Iran's health system comprises 150,000 physicians, 1,500 hospitals and 140,000 hospital beds for a population of 82 million—an average of 1.7 beds per 1,000 people. It also ranks 16th in the world in terms of research output in medicine. In the fight against HIV and drug use, two

interconnected epidemics within the country, Iran has become a notable success both by regional and global standards, providing free and universal access to antiretroviral therapy and harm-reduction programmes, and delivering care tailored to local cultural and community needs. Moreover, a post-revolutionary policy of self-sufficiency has made great strides in the supply of affordable medicine and equipment, importing only raw materials. Before the Revolution, 80 per cent of medications in use were imported. Today, 97 per cent are produced internally, manufactured by around a hundred local pharmaceutical companies, most in the private sector. Yet while only 3 per cent of demand is covered by imports, these include vital medication for children and vulnerable patients with rare or advanced diseases, access to which has been disrupted by us sanctions.

. . . The current impact of this blockade on the Iranian health system falls into three main areas. Firstly, sanctions block most financial transactions required by Iran for its general trading, including medical purchases; exemptions for 'humanitarian' items do not cover protective wear. Secondly, sanctions interrupt the supply chains of domestic production, as even locally produced medications and equipment often rely on inputs from multiple manufacturers in various countries. . . . Thirdly, by reducing purchasing power across the whole economy, sanctions hit healthcare providers and consumers alike.

NIAC: [Official says COVID-19 deaths higher than official figures](#)

BBC: [آمار رسمی مبتلایان و جانباختگان کرونا در ایران: مرگ ۵ هزار و ۲۹۷ نفر و ابتلای بیش از ۸۴ هزار نفر](#)

Aljazira: [How Iran is responding to COVID-19](#)

Negar Mortazavi: [Iran's Nurses Are Martyrs to Trump's Maximum Pressure](#)

The Trump administration's sanctions have made it impossible for Iranian medical personnel to keep themselves safe amid the pandemic.

Kareem Fahim and Dalton Bennett: [Rare voices from Iran's epic coronavirus outbreak tell of stumbling government, deluged hospitals](#), 10/4/2020

The scale of suffering in one of the world's largest outbreaks has largely been obscured

The Lancet, Adriana Murphy, Zhaleh Abdi, Iraj Harirchi, Martin McKee, Elham Ahmadnezhad: [Economic sanctions and Iran's capacity to respond to COVID19](#), 6/4/2020

Tyler Cullis comment: Half-measures, including additional guidance relating to the provision of humanitarian goods and the slow-roll of comfort letters to parties involved in humanitarian trade, will not and cannot resolve these issues. Instead, broader relief for Iran has to be on the table if there is any expectation that Iran will be able to address (and contain) the rising pandemic.

NIAC: [Iran eases social distancing, threatening spike in infections](#)

Juan Cole: [Iran Covid-19 Deaths Rival US as Trump Blockade blocks Medical Supplies; and Europe Defies Washington, 1/4/2020](#)

Erin Cunningham: [As coronavirus cases explode in Iran, U.S. sanctions hinder its access to drugs and medical equipment](#), 29/3/2020

Narges Bajoghli and Mahsa Rouhi: [How Trump Sanctions on Iran Will Worsen the Pandemic](#), 23/3/2020

Tehran doesn't have the resources to enforce quarantines and take other measures to contain the outbreak.

Esfandiyar Batmanghelidh: [How to Help Iran Fight the Virus](#), 24/3/2020

The Trump administration can allow the Islamic Republic to deal with the crisis without compromising American security.

Paul Salem: [Will it take a virus to remind us of our common humanity?](#)

OHCHR: [Bachelet calls for easing of sanctions to enable medical systems to fight COVID-19 and limit global contagion](#)

Kevjn Lim: [How an Iranian Airline Tied to Terrorism Likely Spread the Virus \(and Lied About It\)](#), 30/3/2020

Why is Iran the flaming epicenter of the coronavirus pandemic in the Middle East? One of the primary suspects is Mahan Air.

Ashrin Adib Moghadam: [Coronavirus Solidarity: A 13th Century Mystical Persian Poem about Humanity Shows Why We Need a Global Response](#), 28/3/2020

Djavad Salehi Isfahani: [Tyranny of Numbers: Making sense of Iran's coronavirus statistics](#)

Tom Huf comment: I decided to read it before looking at his credentials. It is a very well reasoned summary that I think merits a nuanced response and interpretation. His credentials are incredibly impressive to boot. His current status as both an Iran Project Fellow and at the Belfer Center at Harvard tells me that his thoughts have been vetted by diplomats, economists, and politicians who at the Kennedy School are recruited from the world of experience and not as successful / accepted academics in political and economic theory.

I think that his initial caveats about it being wise not to accept Iranian data at face value, balanced by the clear explanation of how difficult it is in Iran now to cook the numbers very significantly lands him and us in the middle (Iran is not Saudi Arabia or North Korea). My own work using Iranian Government statistics in our days with the Ministry of Higher Education planning the RSKU and Children's' TV production facilities in Mazandaran left me with very similar conclusions. We justified using their numbers as projections partly by looking backwards and asking our Harvard colleagues whether the old numbers panned out in the present - and they mostly did. The lesson was to think of the statistics as generally OK but not the bible for fine-

tuned assessments.

The extreme assertions of errors of four or five times underreporting that he cites from his colleagues at VA Tech and that I heard and reported on from the April 6th call are doubtful. They were mentioned by Richard Nephew and I think a few others on the call, not as fact but as assertions they had heard. I heard that as a way of saying that the situation there was more severe than reported.

Where does that leave us and others arguing for relaxation of sanctions for humanitarian exceptions?

I don't think it changes anything. We are not arguing based upon the degree of crisis being many times worse than other countries. What we are saying is that it is among the worst. Even if it is comparable to Spain, that assertion is now more solid based on a clear-eyed vetted analysis that has credibility. Being one of the worst in the world and having the US complicit in limiting their access to necessary medical supplies to help get it under control is known by the Iranians and to the rest of the international community. We will be remembered positively for acting quickly to ease their crisis without resorting to alarmist inflated statistics and rhetoric. Or not.

By Andrew Hanna: [Coronavirus Spreads from Iran to Afghanistan](#), Original: April 8, 2020

Twenty-three countries in North America, Europe and Asia have traced the spread of confirmed cases to Iran.

COVID – 19 Aid to Iran: political vs humanitarian responses

By Carolyn Yale

We should not focus on accuracy of numbers in reporting on COVID-19 – whether in Iran or other countries, for that matter—as an excuse for delaying action against the disease. Few countries were prepared for monitoring and responding to a pandemic of this kind: We are all learning as we go about the behavior of the viral infection, how to detect it, and ways to treat it. Defeating the virus requires a concerted scientific, governmental, and humanitarian response to a global pandemic.

Moreover, we should not accept tropes about failures of the Iranian health care system and its inability to deal with the pandemic (that the government is fixed on military priorities, or debilitated by internal corruption and bungling) but look beyond anecdotal accounts and politically motivated messaging. Taken as a whole, Iran's progress in health care delivery since the Revolution has been impressive, and there is reason to believe that given the resources this health care system can respond to COVID-19. What we do know is that Iran's economy is in distress and its ability to put additional resources to the pandemic is therefore limited, thanks in large part to US sanctions and their ripple effects.

The US administration contends that aid will be provided if Iran requests it and that Iran already rejected a US offer earlier this year. We don't know 'on what terms' that assistance was offered or

how conditions may have swayed Iran's decision. For its part, Iran is looking to financial assistance that allows management on its own terms, not for a handout, and certainly not conditioned by political demand from the US. To this end, Iran has appealed to the International Monetary Fund for a \$5 billion loan—a loan which the US, as the largest shareholder, is intent on blocking. In the meantime, Iran is getting help from countries such as China and Russia. Efforts by countries of the European Union have been stifled by US banking sanctions.

Why is it so difficult to clear a path for humanitarian assistance? Why are there such divergent versions of the capacity and reliability of the Iranian government to manage its humanitarian affairs? The answers are multiple:

US sanctions are at the top of the list. Our administration claims to have provided exceptions for humanitarian aid, such as medical supplies. But on the ground this does not bear out. To put it bluntly, "extreme" is indeed the only word for sanctions on Iran—not in scope alone but in paralyzing, arcane detail. Companies are reluctant to conduct 'allowed' trade with Iran for fear of running afoul of the sanctions. The complexity of the rules -- what is and is not allowed in kind, under which circumstances, to what degree -- is daunting. The situations that could trip up a transaction are legion. Companies and banks are very reluctant to do business related to Iran: It is risky and navigating the rules can require in costly legal advice.

A major reason for complexity of sanctions and difficulties of compliance is that the US wants to ferret out any connection with listed terrorist organizations -- notably, the IRGC -- and other prohibited parties, individual or institutional. Tracing the sources and routes of transactions that might be associated with these sanctioned entities means detailed disclosure and investigation. The fear is that resources would be diverted from humanitarian use to other purposes, notably Iran's foreign ventures. Items in trade that could have 'dual use' -- for instance, an ambulance that might also be a military vehicle—are proscribed. Legitimate transactions directed as aid to fight the pandemic may be delayed while OFAC verifies compliance.

US behavior has fostered distrust. The 'maximum pressure' campaign is concurrent, and conflicts with, assurances of channels for aid. In late February, for example, OFAC announced with great fanfare that it had set up a license (General License 8) to allow for certain humanitarian trade transactions with Iran's sanctioned central bank. (Designation of the Central Bank of Iran as a 'specially designated national' blocked assets and prohibited US parties from dealing with the bank.) This timing corresponded closely with tightening of sanctions as a response to bombing in Iraq.

If there is any question where the White House stands on the conflict between humanitarian and political priorities, one need only turn to an April 6, 2020 'fact sheet' from the State Department's "Office of the Spokesperson" titled "[Iran's Sanctions Relief Scam](#)". A series of bullet statements from the president (e.g., "*Iran's slick foreign influence campaign to obtain sanctions relief is not intended for the relief or health of the Iranian people but to raise funds for its terror operations*"), this fact sheet sums up the position that Secretary of State Pompeo has taken. (I checked the date to confirm that this Spokesperson message did not come out on April 1!)

Fundamentally, the US administration's opposition to suspending sanctions is grounded in refusal to do anything that would give the Iranian government latitude to function independent of US oversight and control. This position short circuits prospects for COVID-19 response and will also impede recovery of Iran's workforce from the impacts of the pandemic. But, then, a debilitated economy is the intent of the sanctions; the people of Iran necessarily suffer the 'unintended' consequences.

Putting politics above humanitarian needs is unconscionable, particularly at this critical time. It is urgent that both the US and Iran to calm the rhetoric, 'call a cease fire,' and attend to the wellbeing of their people.

For action:

Use the [PCIA statement on sanctions](#) for talking points with congressional reps.

Donate for humanitarian aid to Iran through one of the following organizations licenses to conduct trade with Iran, listed below:

COVID-19 Relief Efforts in Iran

Dee Fink and Jackie Spurlock have compiled this list of organizations which have OFAC (U.S. Dept. of Treasury Office of Foreign Assets Control) licenses to conduct relief work in Iran and to which you could contribute to alleviate the suffering caused by COVID-19 in Iran:

=> [Razi Foundation](#)

=> [Humanitarian Relief Coalition \(HUERC\)](#)

=> [Relief International](#)

=> [Child Foundation](#)

=> [Moms Against Poverty](#)

US Strategy

International Crisis Group: [The urgent need for a U.S.-Iran hotline](#)

Daniel Larison: [Trump draws a dangerous 'Red Line' in the sea](#)

ICG: [Flattening the Curve of U.S.-Iran Tensions](#)

COVID-19 is ravaging Iran, due to government mismanagement exacerbated by the effects of U.S. sanctions. Instead of pointing fingers at each other, and again risking heightened military confrontation, Tehran and Washington should pursue humanitarian diplomacy aimed at containing the virus and releasing detainees.

ICG: [The Iran-U.S. Trigger List](#)

ICG: [تصویر کلی](#)

Rachel Oswald: [Calls grow for Trump to relax humanitarian sanctions on Iran, April 9, 2020](#)

Eli Clifton: [Collective punishment has always been the stated goal of Iran sanctions hawks](#), March 23, 2020

Shervin Ghaffari and Ryan Costello: [Donald Trump Risks a Dual Crisis of an Iran War During the Coronavirus Pandemic, 23/3/2020](#)

Doyle McManus: Column: [Iran needs medical supplies. Trump should help, 12/4/2020](#)

NYT Editorial: [This Coronavirus Crisis Is the Time to Ease Sanctions on Iran, 25/3/2020](#)
Letting up on “maximum pressure” would also be a wise diplomatic move.

Philip H. Gordon and Ariane M. Tabatabai: [Trump must ease sanctions against Iran or face a humanitarian catastrophe, 3/25/2020](#)

The United States should pause any further escalation of its failing sanctions campaign, offer Iran whatever help it needs to fight the pandemic; expand the list of humanitarian and medical goods exempt from U.S. sanctions, and pledge not to sanction any bank, company or nongovernmental organization involved in providing medical support. Washington should also support an International Monetary Fund loan to be used exclusively to combat the virus and put further sanctions relief on the table in exchange for Iranian nuclear restraint and cooperation in the region.

Critics will say this approach would only reward Iranian bad behavior and bail out a regime that bears responsibility for the tragedy affecting its country. The alternative, however, could be a far greater tragedy that affects us all.

World Council of Churches: [WCC/ACT Alliance/NCCUSA letter to US President Donald J. Trump, 09 April 2020](#)

Melvin Goodman: [The Coronavirus and the urgent need to redefine national security, 25/3/2020](#)

Win Without War: [Voices of Progressive Foreign Policy](#)

Jackson Diehl: [Pompeo’s pandemic performance ensures his place among the worst Secretaries of State ever, 2/3/2020](#)

Pompeo appears to view the epidemic as a handy means to compound “maximum pressure.” To what end? Regime change, which the Secretary of State has made clear he favors, is hardly likely to be the result. More probable is wholesale death of innocent people, and the further discrediting of America’s claim to humanitarianism.

Patrick Cockburn: [Trump’s Chernobyl Moment: the US May Lose Its Status as World Superpower and Not Recover](#)

Chris Murphy: [The US government must prepare now for the next pandemic](#)

Ryan Costello: [COVID-19 outbreak in Iran exposes twisted aims of Iran hawks](#), 1/4/2020

Shervin Ghaffari: [The US Should Help Iran Get the Coronavirus Under Control](#), 14/4/2020

Ray Takeyh and Eric Edelman: [The Next Iranian Revolution](#)

Barbara Slavin comment: Cavalier, irresponsible, ahistorical, cruel and downright crazy ... apart from that it's just brilliant

George Lopez comment: may I add: fundamentally unethical in its antiseptic treatment of what happens to real people in societies torn apart at the seams by grandiose policies imposed by the powerful

Daniel Larison: [Iran is not ours to steer](#), 14/4/2020

Charles Pierce: [Trump's New Iran Strategy Is Both Reckless and Useless](#), 24/3/2020

Sina Toossi: [Iran's Hard-Liners Are Sitting Pretty](#)

Khamenei can only be pleased that Trump has accelerated the trend toward a multipolar global order in which the United States is no longer the dominant power. The Iranian leader has not missed an opportunity to catalyze this shift. "In many cases, we have taken America to the corner of the [boxing] ring,"

Khamenei declared in November 2019. "It could not defend itself. This is clear and the whole world sees it."

The coronavirus crisis has hit the Islamic Republic hard, but there is no indication that the pandemic, any more than the maximum pressure campaign, will lead the government to collapse. Instead, Rouhani and Zarif are hobbled and might never get another chance to pursue bold engagement. Hard-liners are ascendant, and Iran is increasingly turning toward China—not the West—for assistance. Unless bold steps are taken to arrest these trends, the United States risks waging a disastrous full-blown war or being forced to tolerate low-level conflicts in perpetuity while having little, if any, leverage with Iran.

Calls for Humanitarian Detente

European Leadership Network and the Iran Project: [Transatlantic Call to Ease Humanitarian Trade with Iran due to the COVID-19 Pandemic](#), 06 April 2020

Robert Goldson: [Coronavirus and the IAEA reports: From maximum pressure to humanitarian détente with Iran](#), 6/4/2020

Carol Morello: [Former U.S. diplomats and European leaders call for easing sanctions against Iran](#)
6/4/2020

Bryant Harris: [COVID-19 pandemic intensifies Iran sanctions debate](#), 8/4/2020

Route to a Better Deal

Pierre Goldschmidt: [Why a new nuclear deal with Iran is needed now](#)

Sanctions and Waivers

NYT Editorial: [This Coronavirus Crisis Is the Time to Ease Sanctions on Iran](#), 25/3/2020

Washington Post Editorial: [America should help contain Iran's spiking coronavirus epidemic](#), 25/3/2020

State Department: [IRGC-QF Sanctions and Iraq's Electricity Waiver](#)

Farnaz Fassihi: [Iran Says U.S. Sanctions Are Taking Lives. U.S. Officials Disagree](#), 1/4/2020

Oliver Stone and Daniel Kovalik: [Sanctions are terribly cruel during a pandemic: The U.S. should loosen the economic vise against Iran and Venezuela](#), 4/4/2020

Hamed Kermani: [How will the COVID-19 crisis impact US-Iran tensions](#)

Akbar Shahid Ahmed: [Lawmakers Ask Trump To Suspend Sanctions To Help Iran Fight Coronavirus](#), 31/3/2020

U.S. policy stymies Iran's access to medicine and vital equipment, 32 members of Congress say in a letter shared exclusively with HuffPost.

State Department: [Iran's sanctions relief scam](#)

Barbara Slavin comment: so much for any change in US policy

Nadda Osman: [Coronavirus: Activists launch 'digital protest' to end US sanctions on Iran](#)

Joe Cirincione: [Press the Button interview with Ariane Tabatabai re military spending and Iran sanctions relief options](#)

Humanitarian Finance

German Federal Foreign Office: [INSTEX successfully concludes first transaction, 31.03.2020](#)

France, Germany and the United Kingdom confirm that INSTEX has successfully concluded its first transaction, facilitating the export of medical goods from Europe to Iran. These goods are now in Iran. INSTEX aims to provide a sustainable, long-term solution for legitimate trade between Europe and Iran as part of the continued efforts to preserve the JCPOA. Now the first transaction is complete, INSTEX and its Iranian counterpart STFI will work on more transactions and enhancing the mechanism.

Bryant Harris: [US stands down on Europe's new trade mechanism with Iran](#)

Sondos Asem: [Coronavirus: France, Germany and UK begin exporting medical gear to Iran, 1/4/2020](#)

COVID-19 as Cover for War on Iran,

or Motive for Iranian Bomb

Mehdi Hasan: [Beware of Trump Using the Coronavirus as a Cover for War With Iran, 30/3/2020](#)

Juan Cole: [Threatening Iran: Mired in Incompetence on Covid-19 at Home, Trump Tests Wagging the Dog](#)

Joe Cirincione and Rahna Epting: [How to prevent war during the coronavirus pandemic](#)

Trita Parsi: [COVID-19 Crisis: Trump may be giving Iran's hardliners a pathway to the bomb](#)

IAEA

Sina Azodi: [New tensions between Iran and IAEA threaten JCPOA, 26/3/2020](#)

Opportunity Cost of Militarism

Joe Cirincione and William Hartung: [Why America Needs to Rethink Its National Security Priorities](#)

Here's how to change the National Defense Authorization Act.

Mike Ferner: [Bombers Not Ventilators: The High Price Of U.S. Militarism Comes Due](#)

Iraq, Regional Issues

Robert Fisk: [The Middle East doesn't deserve Trump and his troop 'repositioning' – at least have the guts to call it a retreat](#) | **The Independent, 20 March 2020**

Mark Mazzetti and Eric Schmitt: [Pentagon Order to Plan for Escalation in Iraq Meets Warning From Top Commander, 27/3/2020](#)

A secret Pentagon directive orders planning to try to destroy a militia group backed by Iran, but America's top general in Iraq cautions of the risks.

Barbara Slavin: [Trump administration piles on sanctions as the rest of the world helps Iran confront COVID-19, 19 March 2020](#)

Raz Zimmt: [Iran's regional ambitions are not going anywhere, 10/4/2020](#)

Amira Khan: [Amid Coronavirus Crisis, UAE Offers Iran a Surprising Olive Branch, 15/4/2020](#)

US-Iran Regional Flashpoints

Daniel Larison: [Even A Pandemic Can't Kill Threat Inflation, 20/4/2020](#)

Kristen Frontenrose: [US strategy in Iraq and the coronavirus plot twist, 26/3/2020](#)

The one variable that the regime in Tehran may not have considered is this: their assumption that US President Donald J. Trump is loath to start a war with Iran is based on conditions that pre-date coronavirus. With US unemployment skyrocketing, the prospect of ramping up military engagement begins to look like an economic stimulus package and federal jobs program.

Carolyn Yale comment: The competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia bears the stamp of international competition in the ME (national and corporate) that has increasingly relied on weapons to achieve its ends. The solutions (if one wants to disarm this dynamic) are nothing like options set out for US/Iraq by Fontentes; These experts keep looking thru a military lens even as they decry what they see.

Shawn Snow: [11 Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps vessels harass US warships in the](#)

Biden and Congressional Positions on Iran

Tal Axelrod: [Biden calls for sanctions relief for Iran during coronavirus pandemic](#), 2/4/2020

Menendez & Engel propose [Policies for Addressing COVID-19 in Iran](#). 3/4/2020
Joe Crincione comment: A half step in the right direction?

Specific steps should include:

- => Issuing broad licenses to pharmaceutical and medical device companies;
- => Creating a dedicated channel for international banks, transportation companies, insurers, and other service firms to help Iranians access life-saving medical treatment;
- => issuing new sanctions guidance to these groups and international aid organizations to make it clear how they can immediately, directly, and legally respond to the tragedy in Iran, without fear of penalty;
- => And, for entities already conducting enhanced due diligence, it should issue comfort letters to reassure them that they will not be subject to U.S. sanctions if they engage in humanitarian trade with Iran to support its COVID-19 response.

The administration should also consider similar steps to ensure that U.S. sanctions do not inhibit life-saving medical assistance to other countries hard hit by the virus.

Esfandiyar Batmanghelidj comment: Restoration of the oil waivers is probably the single time-bound measure where the market actors would be able to take advantage and deliver actual economic value to Iran. Anything else isn't really going to make a difference in this environment and might just make the politics in both DC and Tehran more complicated.

Thomas Wright: [The Quiet Reformation of Biden's Foreign Policy](#), 3/19/2020

Polling on Iranian and US Public Opinion

Amir Farmanesh, CEO, People Analytics: [Findings of latest IranPoll](#)

I would like to draw your attention to a joint coordinated study by *IranPoll* and 'The Chicago Council on Global Affairs' of both Iranian and American public opinion on key national and international issues.

The Iran part of the study was conducted by IranPoll utilizing our standard nationally representative sampling across two waves:

=> First wave was conducted from October 25 to November 2, 2019 through telephone interviews from 1,000 Iranians.

=> Second wave was collected during December 18-22, 2019 through telephone interviews of 1,007 Iranians. The sampling margin of error was +/- 3.09% for each wave. The US part of the study was conducted January 10 to 12, 2020, by Ipsos among a weighted national sample of 1,019 adults 18 or older living in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia.

Key findings:

=> Large majorities of Iranians say the economy is bad (73%) and getting worse (56%).

=> While most Iranians say domestic mismanagement and corruption (56%) is having a more negative impact on Iran's economy than sanctions (39%), three in four assert that the sanctions are having at least some negative impact on Iran's economy and the living condition of ordinary Iranians.

=> The Iranian public says its government should develop a peaceful nuclear energy program (90%), but not nuclear weapons (59% say it should not).

=> Many Iranians seem to have lost interest in the nuclear agreement reached between Iran and the P5+1 countries in 2015. Just 42 percent of Iranians approve of the nuclear agreement in the December 2019 poll, down from 76 percent approval in August 2015.

=> More than two-thirds of Iranians think their country should militarily respond if the United States, Saudi Arabia, or Israel were to attack an Iranian nuclear facility.

=> If Iran restarts development toward a nuclear weapon, two in three Americans would support the United States rejoining a nuclear agreement with Iran (66%); even larger majorities support diplomacy (85%) and sanctions (77%) to pressure Iran.

=> Majorities of Americans would support cyberattacks against Iranian computer systems, airstrikes against Iranian military facilities, and targeted assassinations if Iran restarts a nuclear weapons program or attacks against US military or diplomatic personnel in the region.

Please find the results of the surveys and their detailed frequency tables [here](#).

A report on the results, jointly written by Dina Smeltz - Senior Fellow at the Chicago Council on Global Affairs - and me, has been published by the Chicago Council and

is available [here](#).

Human Rights

Yeganeh Torbati, Dara Lind and Jack Gillum: [Dr. Sirous Asgari and the intersection of ICE and Sanctions](#), 27_March 2020

Last Friday, news broke about an Iranian professor, Dr. Sirous Asgari, held in ICE detention since November after being acquitted of sanctions violations. Asgari received a Visa to visit his children residing in the US in June 2017. Upon deplaning, he was arrested by the FBI and went through a two-year ordeal before finally being found innocent on all counts. ICE picked him up at the courthouse the day of his ruling.

Hadi Ghaemi: [Trump's refusal to relax Iran sanctions during the coronavirus threatens everyone](#)

Iranian officials were dismissive of the threat, and now their belated efforts are running up against the wall of sanctions. But as usual, the most vulnerable will suffer the most.

NIAC: [Congressional Letter to Pompeo and Mnuchin Urging Easing of Iran Sanctions](#)

Action Alerts

ACTION ALERT March 24, 2020
From Brad Hanson, PCIA Advocacy Group

Our March 17 ACTION ALERT asked that you contact your Members of Congress to call for and legislate a lifting of US sanctions against Iran for the duration of the coronavirus pandemic in order to facilitate Iran getting the medical equipment, protective gear, and medicines it needs to combat the virus and to get other resources for dealing with the consequences for the virus.

This ACTION ALERT has one specific ask.

There is a letter circulating for signature among Members of Congress to Secretary of the Treasury Mnuchin and Secretary of State Pompeo asking them to lift the sanctions. It is well-written, respectful, and diplomatic. You can read the [text of the letter from NIAC's \(National Iran American Council\) website](#).

Contact your Members of Congress, both in the House and the Senate, to sign on to this bicameral letter to Secretaries Mnuchin and Pompeo. *If you do not*

know your Representative's phone number, you can call 202-224-3121 and ask for your Representative by name.

After you call your Members of Congress or engage the media, send PCIA a quick email at advocacy@peacecorpsiran.org and let us know how it went.

Iran remains the epicenter of the corona virus in the Middle East, with the most cases of any country in that region, and among the top four countries of the world in numbers of confirmed cases. [As of 12:43 AM EDT, March 24, Iran had 24,811 confirmed cases, 1,934 deaths., and 8913 recovered.](#)

Some observers believe the true number of cases and deaths is much higher.

There are reports that Iranian hospitals have stopped treating Afghan refugees, among the most marginalized people living in Iran. Thousands are returning to Afghanistan daily, with some undoubtedly infected with the virus.

The world is interconnected. Viruses know no political borders, no boundaries. It is in the US national interest to stop the spread of the virus everywhere in the world. And to lift the additional burden Iran faces – US sanctions – in combatting the coronavirus.

Urge Congress to let Iran self-finance its Coronavirus response by lifting US sanctions on Iran for the duration of the crisis.

Copies of earlier Action Alerts can be found in [PCIA Advocacy Bulletins](#).

Letters to the Advocacy Bulletin Editor

24/3/2020

Always appreciate the insight of the esteemed Mr Barker et. al., and absolutely agree the humanitarian action would be to ease sanctions...AT A PRICE!!!! This is the way of the world. And my opinion, in what seems to be a minority opinion within our Peace Corps Iran community. The US should be prepared to ease sanctions in a nanosecond, as soon as Iran agrees to our own vetted and well-thought through demands (That is our challenge-and where our political pressure should be; not to give Khomeini what he wants just because he wants it.) Don't forget his public pronouncement that the US targeted Iranians and created and spread Corona from US Government labs. Then it is incumbent on their own government to exercise compliance and agreement "for humanitarian reasons".

With respect, George Garrison (Khonsar, 1972-74)

16/4/2020

Dear Paul and others. Thank you for the careful work you and others are doing keeping us informed of what's going on with US Iran relations. The action steps and background information you provide are exceptional. I wrote Sen Markey and will let you know what resulted. You give us something tangible to do in the face of the brutish stance the current administration is taking towards the complex behaviors and circumstances of Iranian policies and daily life. Tremendous thanks.

Kendall Dudley (Sanandaj, 1967-69)

Iran's Economy

Bijan Khajepour: [Can Iran's president turn around its economy?](#)

Peace Corps Global Evacuation

Rebecca Beitsch: [Peace Corps faces uncertain future with no volunteers in field](#), 16/4/2020

Peace Corps Evacuates over 7,300 Volunteers

Due to Coronavirus

By Douglas Schermer

Sometimes with only a 24-hour warning to say good-bye and pack, over 7,300 Peace Corps Volunteers serving in 60 countries were notified they were going home.

"Paula Ospina was in the final months of her two-year assignment as a Peace Corps volunteer in Senegal, where she was working on community-health projects, when the coronavirus reached West Africa." So, begins a March 25 [New Yorker article](#) and video diary about her evacuation experience. I found her video very moving and I think you will also.

Once back in the U.S., most evacuees were required to self-quarantine before they could visit their families. That this situation has been traumatic for them is an understatement. The National Peace Corps Association is doing all it can to help these uprooted volunteers through its Global Reentry Program. NPCA President, Glenn Blumhorst, in an op-ed in the March 21st Chicago Tribune, noted that the evacuated volunteers need additional immediate assistance including:

=> Adequate insurance coverage for physical and mental health.

=> Support in finding work in their U.S. communities here so they can apply their special skill sets

to help their communities overcome this pandemic.

=> [Appropriate exceptions](#) to current policies related to student loans, graduate school, unemployment eligibility and federal hiring.

There has been some discussion in Congress to engage these volunteers in public health service in the face of the Coronavirus crisis. Senators Edward Markey (D-MA) and Chris Van Hollen (D-MD) have announced legislation that seeks to mobilize U.S. citizens—especially evacuated Peace Corps Volunteers—to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. The bill also seeks to extend health care benefits for evacuees and expedite their re-enrollment process when Peace Corps service resumes.

Another fear is that the present administration will take this opportunity to cut or eliminate the Peace Corps. “Our concern is when we get down the road six months or so and conditions have not allowed Peace Corps to return volunteers to the field due to conditions, our fear is it becomes increasingly vulnerable,” said Blumhorst in an [article in The Hill](#).

The NPCA website features individual [stories from Peace Corps evacuees](#).

Elena Kalahar posted a [video diary about her evacuation experience from Panama](#) on YouTube. It is compelling viewing.

NPCA has a [benevolence fund](#) which is being used to help support the evacuated volunteers. I have donated to this fund and I encourage you to do so as well.

Assistance to PCVs Uprooted due to COVID-19

By Mike Kiernan

On behalf of NPCA, I am writing to ask if you would consider submitting a short letter to your representatives in Congress and your local newspaper about the importance of meeting the needs of some 7,000 Peace Corps volunteers recently evacuated from 60 countries due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Many of these volunteers are now in quarantine in the U.S. and face an uncertain future, as does the Peace Corps itself.

NPCA has created a [link to make it easy for you to write your representatives in Congress](#) in support of the Peace Corps and the evacuated volunteers.

In writing a letter to your local paper, feel free to use the language in the Congressional letter. In addition, below is a sample letter that might be helpful.

To submit a letter online directly to your local newspaper, first draft your letter, then google the name of the newspaper and the following words in quotes -- “how to submit a letter to the editor” -- and in most cases, you will find a link with useful instructions. If possible, reference a recent news article on Congressional action on the pandemic at the beginning of your letter.

Please let me know if you have submitted a letter, and if you need assistance or have questions,

contact me, Mike Kiernan, media consultant to NPCA, at mkiernan.media@gmail.com

History

Kelsey Atherton: [Humanity's long history of fighting in the plague room](#), 24/3/2020

Akshai Vikram: [The Roman Empire's experience tells us it's a bad idea to go to war with Iran during a pandemic, April 10, 2020](#)

Previous Editions of PCIA Advocacy Bulletin
Earlier editions of the PCIA Advocacy Bulletin can be found at [this link](#).

MISSION STATEMENT

Peace Corps Iran Association advances peace and understanding between Americans and Iranians through education, outreach and advocacy, and upholds the legacy of the Peace Corps in Iran.

ADVOCACY COMMITTEE PURPOSE STATEMENT

Peace Corps Iran Association advocates for peace and understanding through education, outreach, and cultural diplomacy.

PRINCIPLES: The Board of Peace Corps Iran Association has adopted the following Guiding Principles for our advocacy efforts toward improving relationships between Iran and the United States, and their peoples.

1. Understanding and acceptance of other people and cultures are the building blocks of friendship, inclusiveness and world peace. As citizens of a world power, Americans bear a special responsibility.
2. Tolerance and mutual respect form the foundation for peaceful interactions between countries and their citizens.
3. Bringing countries and their citizens into the global community through cultural and economic ties reinforces international cooperation and reduces the likelihood of armed conflict. .
4. Negotiation and diplomacy are essential to resolving international issues.

5. Force is rarely justified in dealing with conflicts. Peace is built and sustained through voluntary agreement and consent.

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The opinions shared in this issue are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the board of PCIA. Contributions to the Advocacy Bulletin are most welcome and may be submitted to the editor at AdvocacyBulletin@peacecorpsiran.org.



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