

The Coronavirus May be Novel, but It's the Same Old Foreign Policy

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U.S. foreign policy suffers from such tunnel vision that it is unable to change course even with the appearance of something as colossal as the COVID-19 pandemic. The American foreign policy response to the pandemic has ranged from the negative end of the spectrum where the pandemic is ignored and no change is made to the positive end of the spectrum where the pandemic is welcomed as a useful tool for foreign policy.

Yemen

The suffering in Yemen is incalculable and indescribable. Already nightmarish, it has been made more terrifying by the COVID-19 pandemic. [The United Nations begged countries to pause hostilities](#) and stop fighting each other to allow suffering countries to fight the pandemic instead. But while Saudi Arabia has at times expressed a [willingness to respect that humanitarian call in Yemen](#), the United States, blinded by a misplaced anti-Iranian foreign policy in Yemen, has [continued to provide weapons](#) and support to Saudi Arabia as has its British, French and Canadian allies.

China

In Yemen, the appearance of the pandemic caused no change in American foreign policy. In China, it provided the positive opportunity to intensify a propaganda war. The first propaganda shots were fired by Trump's rebranding the virus as the "[Chinese virus](#)" or the "[Wuhan virus](#)."

The war escalated from name calling to bullying when Trump pulled the US out of the World Health Organization, accusing it of being "China-centric." Since the US was the largest state donor to the WHO, contributing 14.67% of funding, it's withdrawal, which dangerously [leaves Bill Gates with the controlling share](#) international health organization, hurts countries burdened with the pandemic when they most need help. Medical associations and allies, including the European Union, have criticized the move for the pain it will cause pandemic torn countries. So, the foreign policy moved from words to hurting countries struggling with the pandemic who needed help the most.

Iran

In Iran, policy moved from no change or wars of words to using the virus as a weapon. In America, obsession with Iran and the maximum pressure campaign out-muscled humanitarian concerns for innocent civilians dying from the virus. "Our policy of maximum pressure on the regime continues," US Special Representative for Iranian Affairs Brian Hook [said](#), as the State Department [added more sanctions on Iran](#), one of the countries

worst hit by the pandemic. Iran had pleaded for an easing of sanctions, since US sanctions are “[severely hampering](#)” Iran’s fight against the coronavirus. Intensifying the sanctions rather than easing them to allow Iran to fight the virus is a form of “[medical terrorism](#),” according to Iran’s foreign minister Javad Zarif.

Venezuela

Venezuela’s struggle against the pandemic is also being fought with American sanctions tying its hands behind its back. In Venezuela, American pandemic policy moved from words, to bullying to extortion. The US attempted to add muscle to its foreign policy of completing a coup in Venezuela by making any hope for sanction relief contingent on democratically elected president Nicolás Maduro surrendering to regime change demands and abandoning his office, completing a decades-long attempt at a coup that dates all the way back to Hugo Chávez in 2002. The US is taking advantage of mass Venezuelan deaths during a pandemic to force Maduro and the party of Chávez out of office. Though disguised as a compromise transition, [it is neither a compromise nor a transition](#), as Maduro would be forced from office and not allowed to run again. Meanwhile, the lives of Venezuelans are held hostage, while the pretender, Juan Guaidó, would be allowed to compete in the next election.

Bolivia

In Venezuela, the pandemic is exploited to advance a coup; in Bolivia, it is exploited to maintain a coup. In 2019, the democratically elected and popular president, Evo Morales, was forced from power in a US supported coup. His legitimate re-election underwent a deceptive American metamorphosis that gave it the illusory appearance of an illegitimate election. But the problem with coups that replace a government the people want with a government the people don’t want is that the people possess memories and consciousness and will eventually return their chosen government to power in a subsequent election. Unless you prevent the election.

In late July, 2020, [Bolivia delayed elections](#), thrusting them into the unreliable future. They blamed the delay on the COVID-19 pandemic. Elections once scheduled for September 6 would now not be held until October 18, if then: this rescheduling is the third delay of the elections that would surely dethrone the coup government of Jeanine Anez. If you let the people vote, only 13.3% of them would vote for the coup government, while 41.9% say they would vote for the party of Evo Morales, according to recent polling by El Centro Estratégico Latinoamericano de Geopolítica.

In Bolivia, a US recognized and supported coup government is using the pandemic to keep the people from removing it from power and to keep itself in power (a foreign policy strategy that [Trump has flirted with](#) in his own domestic policy).

Israel

America’s closest allies have similarly cynically used the pandemic. While Israel acted heroically fast to set up testing for its Jewish population, “[It took more than one month from the first confirmed coronavirus case in Israel for it to set up a testing facility in East Jerusalem](#)” for its Palestinian population. Palestinians had to wait much longer still for additional testing centers.

But Israel did not just delay construction of COVID centers, they also deconstructed them.

On July 21, as Palestinian COVID cases spiked and hospitals overflowed, the Israeli Civil Administration [demolished a West Bank testing and quarantine center](#) that it was hoped would help overwhelmed hospitals.

And it wasn't just Palestinians in hospitals that would suffer: Palestinians in prison would too. Two days after the demolition, Israel's top court ruled that [Palestinian prisoners have no right to social distancing](#). The ruling specifically applied to a prison in Northern Israel that holds 450 Palestinian prisoners and in which several guards and prisoners have already tested positive.

So, the coronavirus may be novel, but there is nothing novel about the pursuit of policy goals by the US and its allies.

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