

# “The Coronavirus pandemic is Magnifying the Cruelty of US Foreign Policy”: The Decade of Transformation: Remaking International Relations

By [Kevin Zeese](#) and [Margaret Flowers](#)

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*The coronavirus pandemic is magnifying the cruelty of US foreign policy. The economic collapse is showing the failure of neoliberalism and how the empire-economy is not working for the people of the world, including the United States.*

The US is losing its global dominance as it demonstrates its own incompetence in response to the pandemic and its viciousness in the midst of this crisis. Other countries are showing leadership and solidarity while the US is escalating its attacks.

This is an opportunity to change direction. What seemed impossible in the recent past is now possible. We must seize the opportunity to create change that ensures the necessities of the people are met and the planet is protected. COVID-19 is one immediate crisis, but the climate crisis, nuclear war and economic insecurity all require solidarity between the people of the world.



End Venezuela Sanctions sign on the Venezuela Embassy, from Venezuela Embassy Protectors Collective.

## The World Is Turning Against Washington For Undermining Solidarity During The Crisis

No country can fully recover from COVID-19 or the economic collapse unless these crises are resolved for the whole world. Both the economy and pandemic are global and interconnected as are the looming crises of climate chaos and nuclear war. Rather than showing solidarity with other nations in the midst of the crises, the US is escalating

economic sanctions and threatening war while undermining a global response to climate and increasing the risks of nuclear war.

[Black Alliance for Peace points out](#): “The brutality and criminality of the colonial/capitalist system of state violence is reflected most graphically by the illegal and immoral policy of sanctions imposed on 39 nations by the U.S. and its Western allies.” Venezuela, Iran and other nations are being denied the ability to import medicines and medical equipment to protect their populations from the COVID-19 pandemic.

On March 23, the [UN General Secretary António Guterres](#) called for “an immediate global ceasefire in all corners of the world” saying nations should “focus together on the true fight of our lives – the [#COVID19](#) pandemic.” [Fifty-three countries](#) immediately agreed. Instead of heeding this call, the US has threatened Iran and Venezuela with military attacks and continued the war with Yemen while [eliminating the majority of humanitarian assistance to Yemen](#). These actions were wrong before the pandemic, but in the midst of the pandemic, they are obscene.

China is sending medical supplies and assistance to 89 countries so far as part of its [Health Silk Road](#). It is ignoring US sanctions by sending drugs, test kits, and supplies to Iran and Venezuela. Hard-hit Italy noted that the other EU nations ignored their desperate plea for medical equipment while China responded. China is building positive relationships by providing [essential equipment and expertise](#) while the [US is trying](#) and failing to get other nations to sign on to a statement blaming COVID-19 on China.

Cuba has [sent](#) brigades of doctors and nurses to Italy, as well as Venezuela, Nicaragua, Jamaica, Suriname, and Grenada. Russia has also sent medical supplies to hard-hit countries like Italy. Even Venezuela, suffering from a US economic blockade and threats of a military attack, is [sending aid to its neighbors, including Ecuador and Colombia](#)– even though Colombia has joined the US in threatening Venezuela. [The US blocked a shipment of coronavirus aid](#) for Cuba from China’s richest man, Jack Ma, including 100,000 facemasks and 10 COVID-19 diagnostic kits, along with other supplies.

Europe is starting to break with the United States. The EU finally sent aid to Iran ignoring US sanctions. [France, Germany, and Britain have sent](#) medical goods to Iran through INSTEX — a workaround to export goods to Iran that bypasses US sanctions. This development could have major implications for the ability of the US to unilaterally sanction nations as it provides a way for countries to trade without the US’ financial system. [Europe, led by Germany, also backed out of war games](#) against Russia, which would have included a practice nuclear attack, due to the COVID-19 virus.

[President Rouhani of Iran sent an open letter](#) to the people of the United States saying, “the war on this virus can only be successful if all nations can win this war together, and no affected nation is left behind.” He urged us to change the direction of the US government, writing, “Future generations will judge the American people based on the actions of their government.”

The zig-zagging incompetence of US policy is evident. During the three months when the Trump administration did not take the virus seriously, the Intercept [reports](#) the United States allowed exports of medical supplies and equipment. After examining vessel manifests, the Intercept found “medical equipment needed to treat the coronavirus [was] being shipped abroad as recently as March 17.” This has led to a “persistent lack of medical

supplies” in the US.

Now, the US has angered allies by diverting medical supplies to the US. [The Washington Post reports](#) that “Berlin expressed outrage over what they said was the diversion to the United States of 200,000 masks that were en route from China, while officials in Brazil and France complained that the United States was outbidding them in the global marketplace for critical medical supplies.” They report the US is also stopping the export of masks to Canada and Latin America.

Even worse, Trump took time from his daily press conference on COVID-19 to escalate threats against Venezuela by [sending US naval vessels](#) near Venezuela’s borders. [AP reports](#) “The deployment is one of the largest U.S. military operations in the region since the 1989 invasion of Panama ... It involves assets like Navy warships, AWACS surveillance aircraft and on-ground special forces seldom seen before in the region.”

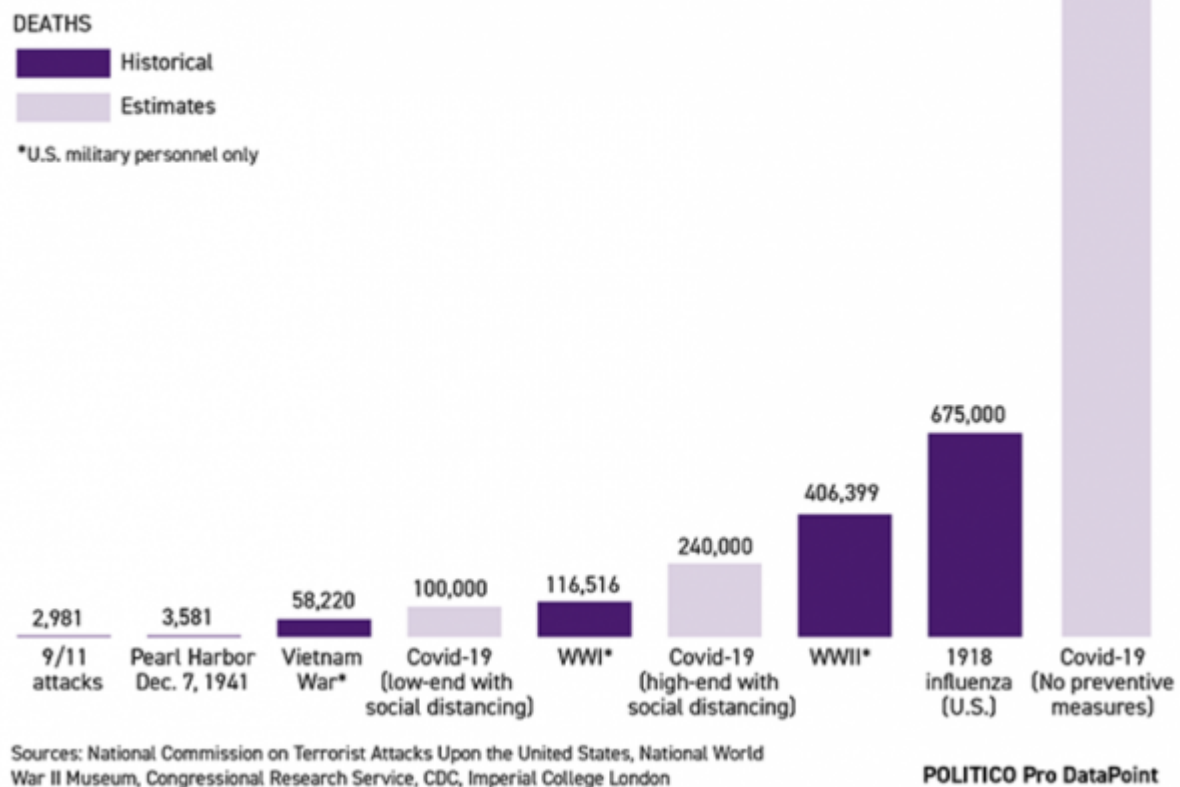
This followed a [phony indictment of President Maduro](#) and other Venezuelan leaders for [alleged narco trafficking](#) that included a \$15 million bounty on Maduro. [President Maduro wrote an open letter](#) to the people of the world that decried the indictment as illegal and part of a US coup attempt writing, “the U.S. government, instead of focusing on policies of global cooperation in health and prevention, has increased unilateral coercive measures, has rejected requests from the international community to lift or make flexible the illegal sanctions that prevent Venezuela from accessing medicines, medical equipment, and food.” The indictment was announced after Venezuela prevented weapons financed by the US from being sent into Venezuela from Colombia for another coup attempt.

Venezuelans in the US who want to fly back to Venezuela to escape the economic and health crises here are not being allowed to charter flights from Florida. The escalation against Venezuela also included the US-controlled [IMF blocking a COVID-19 emergency loan](#) to Venezuela. [Venezuela has taken aggressive actions to stop the spread](#) of the virus and has been more effective than the US.

The US also shows disregard for its own people, including those in the military, by [firing a US Navy Capt. Brett Crozier](#) after he sought help for sailors on the USS Roosevelt aircraft carrier. Crozier wrote his superiors about hundreds of COVID-19 cases and when the letter was leaked, he was fired. As he left the ship, [the crew cheered him](#) for standing up for their health and risking his career. The first government official fired over the virus was one trying to protect people from illness. The US has also directed that reports on [COVID-19 in the military be kept secret](#).

The actions of the US are leading to [the reshaping of global leadership](#).” [Patrick Coburn describes](#) COVID-19 as a “Chernobyl moment” and concludes “nobody is today looking to Washington for a solution to the crisis.”

## Where will Covid-19 rank among U.S. cataclysms?



### National Security Redefined

The people of the United States have been sold a false definition of national security. The pandemic shows that mass military spending on bombs, weapons, bases, and troops does not provide security. The coronavirus is expected to kill between 100,000 to 240,000 people in the United States if our response goes well and could be more than one million if it is inadequate. Deaths have already passed 9/11 and Pearl Harbor and could exceed the Vietnam War and World War 1.

We need to redefine national security. [David Swanson calls for a real Department of Defense](#) that would prioritize “the twin dangers of nuclear and climate apocalypse, and the accompanying spin-offs like coronavirus.” He points out it would be less expensive to provide financial security and top medical care to everyone on the globe than to fight wars.

[Gareth Porter writes](#), “For decades, the military-industrial-congressional complex has forced the American public a warped conception of US national security-focused entirely around perpetuating warfare. The cynical conflation of national security with waging war on designated enemies around the globe effectively stifled public awareness of the clear and present danger posed to its survival by the global pandemic. As a result, Congress was simply not called upon to fund the vitally important equipment that doctors and nurses needed for the Covid-19 crisis.”

The Pentagon was well aware of the threat of a pandemic and anticipated the lack of ventilators, face masks, and hospital beds, according to a [2017 Pentagon plan](#). [Intelligence agencies](#) warned about the threat from influenza viruses for two decades at least and warned about coronaviruses for at least five years. [Luciana Borio, director of medical and biodefense preparedness](#) at the National Security Council in May 2018 [warned that a flu pandemic](#) was the country’s number one health security threat and that the US was



unprepared.

In January 2017, Anthony S. Fauci, MD, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, said [there is “no doubt” Donald Trump will be confronted with a surprise infectious disease](#) outbreak during his presidency. In 2019, HHS [organized](#) a month-long simulation involving multiple federal offices that demonstrated the US was seriously unprepared to cope with a pandemic. Despite all of this, [the president claimed](#) the virus “surprised the whole world,” and “nobody knew there’d be a pandemic or an epidemic of this proportion.”

The White House created a National Security Council office on pandemics, but in 2018 that was [disbanded by Trump](#). The Trump administration also ignored a [pandemic playbook](#) that would have ensured a more effective response. The Strategic National Stockpile has not been maintained for years, as it competes with the military budget, which [shoveled \\$15 trillion into wars](#). The unreplenished stockpile is one reason the US does not have sufficient ventilators and other necessary equipment. The US is also weakened by the [shortcomings of the for-profit health system](#) including [the closing of hospitals](#).



What would actually protect US national security?

First and foremost, the US must cease its drive to be the dominant power in the world and recognize we are part of a community of nations that must cooperate to take on the many crises that will define the 2020s. This means ending military aggression and regime change efforts by respecting the sovereignty and integrity of other countries, large and small. It means ending our occupation of other nations in the form of hundreds of military bases and outposts and ending our support for other occupiers such as Israel until it stops its colonization of Palestine. Instead of international war “games”, we could hold international exercises on disaster responses to save lives. And it means respecting and obeying international law and joining the International Criminal Court. The US must stop behaving with impunity.

Second, the US must scale down the military to what is required for protection, an actual defensive approach rather than being offensive. This means cutting the military budget by

at least 50% and converting all production of military equipment, supplies, and weapons into public entities to remove the profit motive that drives conflict around the world. These resources can be used for social uplift instead of causing death in a peace economy.

Third, the US must move quickly to eliminate threats to human extinction. The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists [reset the Doomsday Clock to 100 seconds](#) to “midnight,” putting the world closer to destruction than at any point since the clock was created in 1947. As Alice Slater [writes](#), we have a virus of nuclear proliferation as [nuclear arms control agreements collapse](#). The US is spending more than a trillion dollars to upgrade nuclear weapons [while placing ‘low-yield’ nuclear weapons on submarines](#).

It’s not only superpowers that are engaged in a nuclear arms race, countries like North Korea, which is threatened by the US, and allies like [Germany and Saudi Arabia](#) believe they need their own nuclear weapons. The US must commit to the rapid disarmament of all nuclear weapons in cooperation with other nuclear nations and disband the Space Force, which violates the treaty that makes space a global commons.

While COVID-19 is [almost certainly a zoonotic disease](#), [David Swanson points out](#) at least some diseases, such as [Lyme Disease](#) and Anthrax, have been spread by military labs. [Germ warfare is a criminal enterprise](#) and so labs disguised as being for our defense but that create bioweapons need to be closed.

Foreign policy includes trade, which has been designed for corporate profit since NAFTA. The coronavirus collapse shows corporate trade creates weak supply lines. It also hollowed out US manufacturing for cheap labor in Mexico, China, and other nations, creating economic insecurity and leaving us ill-prepared for a crisis. Trade must be remade into fair trade that serves the people and planet, supports industry at home, ends factory farming and [creates a balance with nature](#) that will help prevent future animal-based viruses.

A new foreign policy must also confront the climate crisis. This is a global challenge and nations of the world must work together to confront it. The US has been playing a counterproductive role by building fossil fuel infrastructure, becoming a leading oil and gas producer, and holding back global climate treaties. Next week, in our series on “The Decade of Transformation,” we will focus on the environment.



## The Time Is Now to Remake US Foreign Policy

The global economic collapse and COVID-19 pandemic are causing widespread suffering and death but will result in change. What that change looks like, positive or negative, is up to us. We must create the new normal that provides for the necessities of the people and protection of the planet. The world must unite in solidarity to confront not only COVID-19 but other crises too.

We applaud countries that are beginning to stand up to US sanctions and work around the US financial system to help countries like Iran and Venezuela. These are positive steps to end US hegemony. We agree with President Rouhani of Iran, it is our responsibility to remake the government so it reflects the best of us.

An immediate step is to end US sanctions. Join us in [the Sanctions Kill campaign](#) where the coalition will be organizing webinars and other events to end illegal unilateral coercive measures. There will be an international week of action against imperialism and sanctions from May 25 to 31. We will need to be especially creative to build an effective campaign with tactics that work in this time of physical distancing.

We must also take action now to stop the war on Venezuela. Join the webinar with Carlos Ron, vice foreign minister of Venezuela on Monday night at 6:00 pm Eastern. [Click here for information](#). Sign onto [this demand](#) that the US drop its charges against President Maduro and other Venezuelan officials who have been falsely charged with narco-trafficking. We must be ready to mobilize quickly if the US moves to attack Venezuela, or Iran or any country for that matter while the government believes we are distracted by the pandemic.

We are living in a time of crisis and that can be unnerving. But we have the power to get through this if we mobilize together with a clear vision of the world we wish to create and show our solidarity with each other through our actions. We are one human community and we need each other to get through the rough times ahead.

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*Kevin Zeese and Margaret Flowers co-direct Popular Resistance where [this article](#) was originally published.*

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