

U.S. Is Killing Iranians and the World Is Complicit

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A visibly sick and exhausted medic continued to see patients in her small hospital cubicle, writing medical prescriptions with her right hand and receiving intravenous infusion on the left hand. She was a doctor and patient both and had a perfectly acceptable excuse to skip work but she didn't.

Even with weary body and sunken eyes, Shirin Rouhani-Rad spent more than 16 hours a day in hospital seeing patients suspected of Covid19 that were coming in droves. On Thursday night, when people in Iran were preparing for an uncharacteristically quiet and somber Nowruz - New Year - the doctor, now hailed as a 'hero' on social media - lost her own, silent battle to the cataclysmic disease.

Over the past four weeks, since the outbreak of Covid19 in Iran, there have been numerous stories of pain, struggle, loss, courage, resilience, patience, and sacrifice. The eerie silence on the streets is in sharp contrast to the buzz in hospitals, which have become frontlines in this war with doctors and nurses on the forefront, valiantly spearheading the fight.

Narges Khanalizadeh, a 25-year old nurse from northern Iran's Gilan province, was the first healthcare worker in Iran to die of coronavirus in the line of duty. The young nurse could be seen wearing an infectious smile while attending to patients infected by the virus in the early days of its outbreak in Gilan.

The coastal province of Gilan, on the banks of Caspian Sea, has been hit hard by the pandemic, putting heavy burden on hospitals and healthcare workers. As fate would have it, within a gap of few days, Khanalizadeh was seen lying in the same intensive care unit where she took care of patients. The whirlwind journey from a busy nurse to a frozen patient is testimony to the no-holds-barred battle being fought in Iran's hospitals these days.

In an audio clip shared widely on social media, her father speaks to Iran's judiciary chief **Ebrahim Raesi**. In between tears and sobs, his painfully cracking voice illustrated how devastating it is for a father to shoulder the coffin of his brave, young daughter. The father proudly spoke about his girl, her education, her nursing training and her dreams, which were tragically cut short.

Some stories are painful and some inspiring. One nurse at a prominent hospital in Tehran canceled her wedding to be able to take care of patients. Another nurse spoke of how her mother, who had volunteered as a nurse in Iran-Iraq War, urged her to be in the hospital, the 'frontline' in this 'war'. A doctor filmed himself saying he was "feeling better", hours before he succumbed to the disease.

There are also stories that lift the spirits up in these testing times. A 103-year lady in the

city of Semnan, 180 km east of Tehran, recovered from the disease after days of hospitalization. In a viral picture, she displays a paper that reads: “Thank God, I defeated corona”. In a few months, the “super granny” would be celebrating her 104th birthday, thanks to the heroic efforts of healthcare workers.

It has been a difficult fight under extremely challenging conditions. Doctors and nurses in Iran have been pulling out all the stops, despite lack of resources, to help patients recover. Their efforts to fight the pandemic have been stymied by the acute shortage of medicine and equipment, as Iran isn’t able to import them due to US sanctions. With severe shortage of equipment and medicine largely due to the cruel US sanctions on Iran, they are facing an uphill task to contain the outbreak and save precious lives.

Recently, Iran’s **Foreign Minister Javad Zarif** tweeted a list of items required to contain the outbreak, which included ventilators, electroshock devices, nebulizer devices, infusion pumps, CT Scan 16 Slice machines, eco-sonography devices, digital x-ray machines, diagnostic test kits, protective masks, disposable gloves etc. In normal circumstances, it shouldn’t be problematic to import these items, but the US sanctions have made it difficult for Iran.

According to the health ministry, 50 new cases of the virus and 6 deaths are reported every day. The death toll has seen an alarming surge over the past one week, while new cases have also seen steady rise. The epicenter has lately shifted to Tehran from Qom, which is evident from the rush in city hospitals where people are making beelines to get tested. Iran’s elite revolutionary guards are also running hospitals to lessen the burden on main healthcare centers, but clearly the crisis is massive.

The worst affected are the survivors of former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein’s chemical attacks during the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq War, estimated to be around 100,000 in Iran. Many of them have chronic respiratory conditions caused by exposure to nerve gas and Covid19 affects them the most. There are reports that a large number of war veterans have died of the disease in recent weeks across Iran, those with lung and heart related problems.

Although medicine is exempted from the draconian embargo Trump administration has imposed on Iran, foreign companies have been under enormous pressure from anti-Iran hawks in Washington, who have made no secret of their desire to see Iranians choked to death. It was clear this week as the US government announced fresh sanctions on Iran’s petrochemical industry, in the middle of the pandemic.

Despite the global outcry and letters written by Iran’s president and foreign minister in recent days to world leaders, seeking their help and cooperation in fighting this pandemic, and reminding them of the unilateral and illegal US sanctions on Iran, the international community hasn’t broken its silence yet. What is especially revealing is the behavior of some Muslim Arab countries that prevented the Non-Aligned Movement from issuing a joint statement in condemnation of the US sanctions on Iran.

The statement that sought to urge the US to ease its sanctions on Iran as they are impeding Iran’s efforts to fight the pandemic was met with opposition from Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Morocco and Yemen. These countries are complicit in America’s crimes against humanity. The world needs to speak up, not just against the US, but all its accomplices. Silence at this moment amounts to complicity or cowardice or both.

Hard times don't last but they reveal the true character of people. Hard times also unmask friends and foes. History will remember how the international community, barring a few nations, contributed to the catastrophic situation in Iran in the wake of this pandemic by siding with the oppressors. Those who stood on the wrong side of history might face a similar situation sometime in future. America never had any permanent friends, and the likes of Saddam and Qaddafi would vouch for it from their graves.

There should be absolutely no confusion over this. The unilateral sanctions reimposed on Iran by the US administration in 2018 and the embargo of humanitarian and medical supplies is illegal and inhumane, and that's what the International Court of Justice also found. It is not just illegal but a blatant crime against humanity when lack of access to medicine and equipment is causing hundreds of deaths in Iran every day. Every life counts and every death is a coldblooded murder by the US and its allies.

It is pretty simple and clear that these sanctions are an attempt to let the pandemic spread in Iran and allow the situation to crush Iran's health care system. Having failed to crush the resolve of brave Iranians in the battlefield, where just a few missiles forced Trump and his lackeys into hibernation few months ago, the hawks in Washington, egged on by their friends in Tel Aviv and Riyadh, have found a cowardly way to attack Iranians. They will fail here too.

The people of Iran are determined to see through this dark phase too and life will be normal again. But they will remember who stood by them and who stood against them. This spring may not have brought glad tidings for Iranians but the next spring will. Iran is here to stay, prosper and progress.

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