

# The Iranian Regime, Enduring Coronavirus Epidemic, Blames Infidels

by Hugh Fitzgerald



Iran is run by a collection of clerical gerontocrats who are fanatical in their faith. Unfortunately, their faith has not been enough to see them through the coronavirus. Their Supreme Leader is Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who confidently told his countrymen on March 2 that the coronavirus was “not that big a deal” and soon would pass. He was wrong on both counts, and now Iran is the epicenter of the disease for the entire Middle East, and the third hardest-hit country, after China and Italy, in the world.

The panicky reaction of the Iranian rulers, who do not know where to put their feet and hands, has unsurprisingly led them

to denounce, not their own incompetence, but the Infidels – the European Union and the United States – for not lifting sanctions on, and for not sending money to, Iran. You can just hear them: “Why are you Infidels so cruel? When have we ever shown you anything but kindness?” (Yes, let’s forget about all those “Death to America” and “Death to Israel” demonstrations.)

The story is [here](#).

*In an interview with the Spanish newspaper La Razon, Hassan Qashqavi – the Islamic Republic’s ambassador in Madrid – railed against the “cruel and inhumane” sanctions imposed by the US following its 2018 decision to leave the nuclear deal with Iran that was agreed with the previous Obama administration.*

The “sanctions” are neither “cruel” nor “inhumane.” They constitute a reasonable attempt to convince the Iranian rulers to do two things: first, to stop sending money and weapons to the Houthis in Yemen, to the Shi’a militias in Iraq, to the terror group Hezbollah in Lebanon and – Iran’s most costly intervention by far – to Assad in Syria; second, to discontinue work on their nuclear program, and to open for inspection the three sites that Iran had kept hidden from the IAEA, but that were revealed in the trove of documents Israeli agents whisked out of Tehran in 2018.

*The 147 coronavirus deaths in Iran on Wednesday [March 19] marked the highest daily toll in the country so far. Nearly 1,200 Iranians in total are reported to have died – although the regime’s lack of transparency and increasing reliance on the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) to enforce “social distancing” protocols likely means the number is higher.*

*The European Union also came in for heavy criticism from Iranian leaders for abiding by the US sanctions.*

*The Europeans who claim to be advocates of human rights should be ashamed of their behavior at a time when Iran is grappling with the fast-spreading-virus,” Ali Baqeri Kani – head of the Iranian Judiciary’s High Council for Human Rights – declared on Thursday.*

Why should Europeans, as advocates of human rights, be “ashamed of their behavior” – meaning their refusal to supply aid to Iran? As one of the greatest abusers of human rights in the world, surpassed only by China and North Korea, Iran hardly deserves support from the E.U., which presents itself as a champion of human rights.

*There is a growing opinion among Iran analysts that the coronavirus presents an unprecedented challenge to the Islamic regime that came to power in 1979, especially as it had already been weakened by the renewal of international sanctions and the US assassination of one of its top military commanders, Gen. Qassem Soleimani, in January.*

*“The regime is not ready for this challenge,” Maj. Gen. (ret.) Yaakov Amidror – a former Israeli national security adviser – told a conference call organized by the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (JINSA) on Thursday.*

***Amidror also observed that Iran had become the “epicenter” of the virus in the Middle East, “because people were flying to Beirut from Iran and back, and the Iraqis didn’t close their border with Iran.”***

It is known that the coronavirus has been spread to at least eight Muslim nations by people returning from Iran, including pilgrims and students studying in Shi’ite seminaries in Qom. They have infected people in Bahrain, the UAE, Qatar, Oman, Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, and Pakistan with the coronavirus. It did not have to be this way.

It is not the E.U. and the U.S., but Iran itself that has a lot to answer for. As soon as the first cases were announced, on February 19, in Qom, the Iranian government ought to have put the city in lockdown. It didn't take any great expertise to know that Shi'a from around the region were coming and going to and from Qom, and that unless Qom were shut down completely, these human vectors would spread the disease exactly as they did.

Why didn't Iran take this obvious step when there was still time? Iran is in the grip of a theocracy, fanatical clerics who did not want to shut down the world center of Shi'a learning, not for a virus that the Supreme Leader himself had pooh-poohed as "not so much of a deal." So infected humans went from Iran to Bahrain, the UAE, Qatar, Oman, Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Even now, at the end of March, Qom has still not been completely shut down. Nor has Iran closed down much elsewhere, ignoring the lessons of China and Italy, and what is now being done in France, Spain, the U.S., to limit the spread of the disease.

Attempts by the government to close shrines and mosques in Qom and Mashhad have been met with fury from local clerics. Ordinary worshipers have attempted to break into those shrines and mosques, defying Iran's leaders who are trying to bar access to religious sites, as they struggle to halt a soaring death rate caused by the coronavirus. Rioters who tried to enter two of Iran's holiest sites, the Masoumeh shrine in Qom, and the Imam Reza shrine in Mashhad, were beaten back by police. But they no doubt will keep trying.

The Iranian government cannot begin to deal with the coronavirus unless it takes on the very devout, who insist that mosques remain open, and that life go on as usual, because they are convinced that Allah will sort things out. It's time for fanatical theocrats to take on even more fanatical theocrats. At a minimum, the government has to shut down travel among cities, shut down places where people

congregate within cities. That means restaurants, stores, open-air markets, workplaces, and offices all need to be shut down; all gatherings of more than fifteen people should be prohibited; Iranians need to stay home and shelter in place, just as Infidels are now doing all over Europe and North America. At this point, such measures will not prevent a continuing increase in cases in Iran, but will slow down that increase. If no special measures are taken, an Iranian specialist, Dr. Firuz Eslami, has warned there may be “millions” of cases.

As for Iran’s anger at the U.S., it is entirely misplaced. In late February Secretary of State Pompeo offered Iran humanitarian and medical assistance; it was Iran that turned down the offer.

That suggests that Iran’s leaders are insufficiently alarmed, if they think they can still afford to turn down, in a fit of spite, such humanitarian and medical aid from the U.S. A month has passed since that rejection, and Iran may be ready to reconsider, given that the number of deaths from the virus keep rising exponentially. Until now, Iran has spent tens of billions of dollars a year both on its nuclear program, and on its wide-ranging aid to proxies and allies in Yemen, Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria. But the relentless spread of the coronavirus within Iran may well have concentrated minds, and the regime should now accept the American aid they turned down a month ago. And if at this point the Americans attach conditions to their generosity, Iran is in no position to refuse. All Iran has to do for medical and humanitarian aid to be provided to it by the generous Infidels of the Great Satan is to call a halt to its foreign adventurism – in Yemen, Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria – and to cease working on its nuclear program. It’s Iran’s decision. So far it’s been making all the wrong ones, but one may hope that as the number of coronavirus deaths surges beyond 2,000 in Iran’s official (i.e., extremely low) figures, saner heads – even if turbaned – will prevail.

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