

Amid Coronavirus Outbreak, Trump-aligned Pressure Group Pushes to Stop Medicine Sales to Iran

By [Eli Clifton](#)

Global Research, March 09, 2020
[The Intercept](#) 5 March 2020

Region: [Middle East & North Africa, USA](#)
Theme: [Intelligence, US NATO War Agenda](#)

Despite a massive coronavirus-related public health crisis, an anti-Iran pressure group with close ties to the Trump administration is urging major pharmaceutical companies to “end their Iran business,” focusing on companies with special licenses — most often under a broadly defined “[humanitarian exemption](#)” — to conduct trade with Iran.

With a novel strain of coronavirus rapidly spreading around the world, Iran has been hit particularly hard, with 107 deaths and 3,515 infections recorded so far. Yet the pressure group, [United Against Nuclear Iran](#), is carrying on with its campaign targeting medical trade with Iran despite the Trump administration’s [special financial channels](#) for humanitarian goods and medicine to reach the beleaguered country.

“U.S. sanctions have had a long-term impact on Iran’s ability to freely import medical supplies,” said Tyler Cullis, an attorney specializing in sanctions law at Ferrari & Associates. He pointed to “outside groups” that seek to bolster the Treasury Department’s investigatory heft and provide information on companies doing trade with Iran. “In tandem with U.S. sanctions,” Cullis said, “these groups have sought to impose reputational costs on companies that engage in lawful and legitimate trade with Iran, including humanitarian trade.”



The medical and humanitarian trade are carved out of crippling sanctions against Iran through special licenses issued by the Treasury Department. But companies must apply for the licenses then carry out the trade — something United Against Nuclear Iran, known as UANI, seeks to discourage.

“Their efforts are not insignificant,” Cullis said. “It is, after all, not an altogether lucrative enterprise selling medical supplies to Iran, so the name-and-shame operations of outside groups have a significant impact on the cost-benefit analysis associated with doing business with Iran.”

Joshua Silberberg, a spokesperson for UANI, declined to respond to questions about the group’s effort to name and shame companies doing medical trade with Iran. “UANI has a long history of expressing support and solidarity with the Iranian people,” he said, pointing to a [statement](#) applauding the finalization of the Swiss Humanitarian Trade Arrangement, an agreement arranged by the U.S. and Swiss governments.

UANI says it aims to persuade “the regime in Tehran to desist from its quest for nuclear weapons, while striving not to punish the Iranian people.” (The U.S. intelligence community [does not believe](#) that Iran has any desire or plans to build nuclear weapons.) UANI’s efforts, however, have extended beyond sanctions into pressuring companies that do legal trade with Iran, often under the Treasury Department’s humanitarian exemptions to sanctions — including medical-related trades that would presumably aid in combating a massive public health crisis like this coronavirus outbreak.

UANI operates an “[Iran Business Registry](#)” that provides an online database of companies it believes are conducting business in or with Iran — a name-and-shame strategy to increase Iran’s economic isolation. The pressure campaign has targeted multiple medical companies with Treasury Department licenses to conduct trade with Iran. Nine pharmaceutical, biotechnology, and medical-device corporations, all with special licenses, are listed on UANI’s business registry. Companies urged by UANI to “end their Iran business” include [Bayer](#), [Merck](#), [Pfizer](#), [Genzyme](#), [AirSep](#), [Medrad](#), [Becton, Dickinson & Company](#), [Eli Lilly](#), and [Abbott Laboratories](#).

The legal channels for humanitarian trade are [widely reported](#) to be failing to provide a sufficient flow of medicine and other humanitarian goods.

Uani’s efforts are particularly notable in light of the group’s close ties to the Trump administration; Iran’s regional adversaries Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Israel; and the Republican Party’s biggest donors, Sheldon and Miriam Adelson.

Senior UANI adviser [John Bolton](#) worked for UANI both before and after his stint in the Trump administration as national security adviser. UANI’s umbrella group, Counter Extremism Project United Inc, [paid Bolton \\$240,000](#) between 2016 and 2017. Bolton’s appointment as national security adviser was [quickly followed](#) by Trump’s withdrawal from the nuclear deal with Iran.

Besides Bolton, the Trump administration twice sent Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to UANI’s annual conference, held during the United Nations General Assembly. Pompeo used the occasions to [promote outlandish claims](#) about Europe purportedly financing Iranian terrorism and to present the administration’s “maximum pressure” strategy to UANI’s audience, which included senior diplomats and intelligence officials from the Persian Gulf and Israel.

The group’s last summit, held in September, featured U.S. Ambassador to Germany Richard Grenell, who is now Trump’s acting director of national intelligence, as well as a who’s who of the Trump administration’s hawkish Middle East partners, including top diplomats from

Persian Gulf monarchies and Israel. (UANI and its affiliated organizations have a number of links to Gulf monarchies, including a 2014 email from a UANI advisory board member soliciting “[support](#)” from the United Arab Emirates.)

UANI’s [top funder](#), billionaire [Thomas Kaplan](#) — an investor whose companies have looked to profit from “[political unrest](#)” in the Middle East — was also in attendance at the summit.

Finally, Sheldon and Miriam Adelson’s [financial support](#) for UANI closely tracks the Republican megadonors’ hawkish views toward Iran. In 2013, [Sheldon Adelson](#) told an audience at Yeshiva University that Obama [should launch](#) a nuclear strike on Iran and threaten that Iran will be “wiped out” if it doesn’t dismantle its nuclear program. The Adelsons were Trump’s biggest funders in the 2016 election and the GOP’s biggest funders in the 2018 cycle. They are [expected](#) to contribute at least \$100 million to Trump’s reelection efforts and Republican congressional candidates in the 2020 cycle.

While the Trump administration’s extreme financial pressure against Iran is coinciding with the coronavirus outbreak, Tyler Cullis, the sanctions lawyer, was careful to note that issues with ensuring a robust trade of medical and humanitarian supplies to Iran began under previous administrations. “While those problems have been exacerbated under the Trump administration,” Cullis said, “their origination takes place more than a decade ago when prior administrations first started imposing enormous sanctions pressure on Iran’s financial sector.”

*

Note to readers: please click the share buttons above or below. Forward this article to your email lists. Crosspost on your blog site, internet forums. etc.

The original source of this article is [The Intercept](#)
Copyright © [Eli Clifton](#), [The Intercept](#), 2020

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Eli Clifton](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca
www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca