

Does Weaponizing a Pandemic and Blaming China “Make America Great Again”?

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Theme: [Media Disinformation](#), [Science and Medicine](#)

United States president Donald Trump is proud of the US effort against COVID-19. In his 1 May remarks on protecting America’s seniors, he said,

Through aggressive actions and the devotion of our doctors and nurses, however, we have held our fatality rate far below hard-hit other countries such as Spain and Italy and United Kingdom and Sweden. We’re way below other countries.

Trump employs the logical fallacy of the confirmation bias. In this case, he selectively chooses from among the most ravaged world nations suffering from COVID-19 to compare the US. There are 190 or so other countries where the US does not fare so well in comparison. Why doesn’t Trump compare the US to his designated enemies of the US? Why not compare the US to Cuba, Venezuela, Iran, Russia, and especially China? Maybe Trump won’t do that, but the rest of us can look at the data and compare.

[COVID-19 Fatality Data for 1 May 2020](#)

Country	Total Deaths	New Deaths	Deaths/1 M pop
United States	65,753	1897	199
Cuba	64	3	6
Venezuela	10	0	0.4
Iran	6091	63	73
Russia	1169	96	8
China	4633	0	3

One should regard the data with some skepticism. There may well be underreporting or misreporting of the number of cases. There may be misdiagnoses. Countries may also be in different stages of fighting the pandemic. Nonetheless, what jumps out from the data is that the US is being ravaged by the coronavirus far worse than Trump’s designated adversaries.

Trump reversed the normalization of ties, began under president Barack Obama, between Cuba and the US. Instead, Cuba has been targeted by the Trump administration policy of “maximum pressure.” This pressure included the US blocking of 100,000 face masks, 10 COVID-19 diagnostic kits, and other aid such as ventilators and gloves donated by Chinese entrepreneur Jack Ma. Nonetheless, Cuba and its socialized medicine have a far lower fatality rate than the US. Cuba to its good reputation has sent [medical personnel abroad to help fight COVID-19](#), and it has even been so magnanimous to [offer aid to the US](#). Venezuela, another socialist nation, has been targeted for sanctions by the anti-socialist Trump. Venezuela also fares statistically better than the US with 0.4 deaths per 1 million

people compared to the US's 199 per 1 million people. The US's weaponization of the pandemic is also being used to try and topple the government of Iran. These actions clearly evince that the US has little regard for the populace of the countries. Yet, even though hard hit, Iran fares much better than the US. Russia is fighting COVID-19, but the situation up to now is much less lethal than in the US.

China, being where the pandemic broke out, had to identify the virus, treat the people, and strategize how to contain COVID-19. Its tackling COVID-19 has been sterling in comparison to the US, especially given the many weeks the US had to prepare for the pandemic to hit US shores; knowing what the pathogen was; knowing the genetic profile, thanks to China; and knowing how China has been dealing with the contagion.

Trump boasts: "And other countries are asking us for help, and we're helping other countries: allies and some that aren't necessarily allies, but they're in big trouble."

A group of prominent economists maintain that the sanctions imposed by the Trump administration are "[feeding the COVID-19 epidemic](#)." Columbia University professor Jeffrey Sachs said,

This policy is unconscionable and flagrantly against international law. It is imperative that the U.S. lift these immoral and illegal sanctions to enable Iran and Venezuela to confront the epidemic as effectively and rapidly as possible.

Trump, notorious for his [lack of diplomatic verve](#), threatens others in the time of a pandemic. Any iota of decorum should tell Trump not to kick an opponent when he is down. And, referring to the fatality table above, it is clear that the US is also in "big trouble."

Polling neck-in-neck with a cognitively impaired presidential challenger, COVID-19 not abating, unemployment shooting upwards, the US economy sinking, Trump continues to deflect. He is quick to take credit when he considers the economy to be strong, but when the economy turns for the worse, he is quick to look elsewhere and point a finger:

It's horrible that — what this country [the US] has gone through and what the world has gone through, frankly. This is something — it could have been contained at the original location, and I think it could have been contained relatively easily. China is a very sophisticated country, and they could have contained it. They were either unable to or they chose not to, and the world has suffered greatly.

As CGTN made clear:

China was the first to confront COVID-19, which has made its challenge much greater. But the point about China is that it's not a talker, it's a doer, and when it got hold of the problem, it gave an impressive performance!

Trump just can't let up on [deflecting blame](#) from his government's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic:

“The virus situation is just not acceptable...”

“It came out of China, and it could have been stopped, and I wish they stopped it. And so does the whole world — wish they stopped it....”

“But they could have stopped it. They are a very brilliant nation — scientifically and otherwise. It got loose, let’s say, and they could have capped it. They could have stopped it. But they didn’t.”

This prompted a media person to ask:

You praised China in the past, so what’s changed? When you tweeted, ‘China has been working very hard to contain the coronavirus. The [U.S.] greatly appreciates their efforts on transparency. It will all work out well...’ What has changed between then, when you were saying these things about China, and now?

Trump:

Well, what’s changed is the following: We did a trade deal and everybody was very happy. There’s nobody ever been tough on China like I’ve been tough on China. I got elected, at least partially, because of borders and military and different things, but one of the things I’d say is how China and other countries are ripping us off.

So recently, we signed a trade deal with China, a number of months ago. China is buying billions of dollars’ worth of our product, our farm product and other product, manufacturing product, and it’s been a great deal. But then, we noticed a virus. And it’s not acceptable what happened. It came out of China, and it’s not acceptable what happened.

And now what we’re doing, Jim, is we’re finding out how it came out. Different forms — you know, you’ve heard all different things. You’ve heard three or four different concepts as to how it came out. We should have the answer to that in the not-too-distant future, and that will determine a lot how I feel about China.

The answer was a classic *non sequitur*. China while dealing with the early stages of a contagion still negotiated a trade deal with the US. A less callous trade partner might have insisted: let’s put things on hold while you deal with this epidemic. Still Trump’s reply is puzzling: how does a trade deal logically connect to Trump’s changed opinion of China’s handling of COVID-19? Moreover, who out there is saying the pandemic is acceptable?

A better question would have been: Mr President, you say China “could have stopped it” being “a very brilliant nation — scientifically and otherwise.... They could have stopped it. But they didn’t.” So you are

1) implying that China did this intentionally, that they exposed themselves to the virus and the shutting down of their economy; and

2) you also imply that America is not so brilliant because Americans have not stopped the pandemic within their borders. Even worse, given the time lag that the US had to prepare for the arrival of SARS-CoV-2 and given the far more deleterious impact on American lives and health as well as the vibrancy of economy, brilliance is not an apt adjective.

Nothing about this pandemic in the US points to [America becoming great again](#).

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