

International Briefs

UN Warns: 34 Million Are ‘One Step Away From Starvation’

More than 34 million people are “one step away from starvation,” according to a new report from UN agencies on world hunger hotspots released in March. Authored by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Food Program (WFP), the 38-page document includes a map showing many affected countries, stressing that several hotspots—including Northern Nigeria, Yemen, and South Sudan are already in the grip of starvation. Titled “Hunger Hotspots: FAO-WFP Early Warnings on Acute Food Insecurity,” the [report](#) covers the period from March to July 2021.

The figures in the report are terrifying: Just in the Introduction, the report states: “While the next Global Report on Food Crises will be launched in April 2021 by the Global Network Against Food Crises, a significant increase in the numbers of people in acute food insecurity is evident through new IPC [Integrated Food Security Phase Classification] analyses or similar analytical processes in countries where the IPC/CH analyses have not been undertaken, with 174 million people in IPC Phase 3 or worse in the 58 countries covered. Of absolute urgent and imminent concern today are more than 34 million people in IPC Phase 4 across the world who already face emergency levels of acute food insecurity.” In the IPC ranking, from one to five, the fifth category is imminent death.

Catholic Cardinal in Syria To World: ‘Time Running Out’ for Rebuilding Syria

At a virtual press conference March 23, organized by the Catholic charity Caritas Internationalis, Roman Catholic Cardinal Mario Zenari, the Apostolic Nuncio to Syria since the beginning of the Syria war, issued an appeal for international support to reconstruct the country, as time is running out. “Peace, I repeat, will not come to Syria without reconstruction and without economic recovery,” Zenari said. “But how long will Syrians have to wait? Time is running out. Many of the people have lost hope. Urgent and radical solutions are needed”

The Cardinal said that about 90 percent of the population of Syria is living below the poverty line, which according to UN figures is “the highest percentage in the world.”

Cardinal Zenari reported, “The Syrian pound has lost much of its value against the U.S. dollar. The price of food has significantly increased. At the bakeries, people queue to try to get the limited subsidized bread that is available. The same scene for petrol all around the country.... The people call this difficult time an ‘economic war,’ worse than that of previous years.” He stressed that the effects of the sanctions are brutal.

British Empire Prepares for Perpetual Geopolitical Confrontation

The UK Defense Command [Paper](#), “Defence in a Competitive Age,” released by Secretary of State

for Defense Ben Wallace on March 22, as a follow-up to the defense, security, and foreign policy review released in mid-March, focuses on the “21st-century threats” that the UK supposedly faces in a world allegedly characterized by permanent confrontation.

The essential axiomatic basis of the new policy comes down to this statement in the report: “The notion of war and peace as binary states has given way to a continuum of conflict, requiring us to prepare our forces for more persistent global engagement and constant campaigning, moving seamlessly from operating to war fighting.” The armed forces “will no longer be held as a force of last resort, but become more present and active around the world, operating below the threshold of open conflict to uphold our values and secure our interests, partner our friends and enable our allies, whether they are in the Euro-Atlantic, the Indo-Pacific, or beyond.”

In other words, the UK will be in a permanent state of confrontation, if not always a shooting war, against Russia, China, and any other designated enemies who refuse to submit to the “rules-based international order” dictated by the Anglo-American empire.

Iran and China Sign 25-Year Strategic Cooperation Agreement

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif signed a 25-year comprehensive strategic partnership agreement on March 26, marking a milestone in bilateral rela-

tions between the two countries, reported Press TV. Wang and Zarif also marked “half a century of friendly diplomatic relations” by opening an exhibition of documents on the two countries’ bilateral ties.

Wang said China’s relations with Iran will be “permanent and strategic” and will not be affected by the current situation. “Iran decides independently on its relations with other countries and is not like some countries that change their position with one phone call,” he said during a meeting with Ali Larijani, former speaker of the Iranian parliament and now an advisor to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.

RT noted that “the Sino-Iranian Comprehensive Strategic Partnership was first announced in January 2016 during a visit to Tehran by Chinese President Xi Jinping. The agreement is touted as securing Iran’s participation in China’s Belt and Road Initiative, which is aimed at diversifying trade routes between China and its key partners through ambitious infrastructure projects in various countries.”

Wang’s tour of Southwest Asia, March 24 to March 30, also included visits to Saudi Arabia, Turkey, U.A.E., Bahrain and Oman.

CFR Demands: Stop the Belt and Road Before It’s Too Late!

The Council on Foreign Relations task force on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) released a [report](#) March 23, “China’s Belt and Road: Implications for the United States,” warning that the BRI is taking over the globe and must be stopped if the U.S. is to remain lord of the world. The opening statement of its Executive Summary is aggressive: “The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Chinese President Xi Jinping’s signature foreign policy undertaking and the

world’s largest infrastructure program, poses a significant challenge to U.S. economic, political, climate change, security, and global health interests.”

Former chief of Naval Operations Adm. Gary Roughead, co-chair of the task force, along with former Obama Treasury Secretary Jacob J. Lew, told Fox News on March 23 that it is “important that America understands just how extensive the BRI is, and how China has been able to expand globally, and penetrate” into what he considers some of the key factors of what will determine “national power and America’s role in the world....”

Blinken Brandishes Big Stick at Germany Over Nord Stream 2

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken issued an ultimatum to the German government on March 18, ordering it to drop the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, or else. A [press statement](#) issued under his name March 18 reads: “As the President has said, Nord Stream 2 is a bad deal—for Germany, for Ukraine, and for our Central and Eastern European allies and partners. The Department is tracking efforts to complete the Nord Stream 2 pipeline and is evaluating information regarding entities that appear to be involved.

“As multiple U.S. administrations have made clear, this pipeline is a Russian geopolitical project intended to divide Europe and weaken European energy security. The sanctions legislation Congress passed in 2019 and expanded in 2020 has significant support from a bipartisan Congressional majority.

“The Biden Administration is committed to complying with that legislation. The Department reiterates its warning that any entity involved in the Nord Stream 2 pipeline risks U.S.

sanctions and should immediately abandon work on the pipeline.”

It is to be seen how the threatened sanctions would affect construction, which is in the terminal phase.

Biden and Boris Johnson ‘Brainstorm’ on Climate Action Events

President Biden and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson spoke by phone on March 26 to strategize over upcoming climate action events. According to the White House [readout](#), they discussed “the importance of developing ambitious climate goals, noting the opportunities provided by the Leaders Summit on Climate and the UK’s G-7 presidency.” The White House has invited 40 heads of state to its “Leaders” event April 22-23. It will be virtual, but livestreamed, apparently to let leaders grandstand about what a great job they are doing in cutting carbon emissions. As of early April, Russia and China had not yet given their response to the invitation.

Pope Sends Message to Julian Assange

According to a Palm Sunday tweet by Julian Assange’s partner Stella Moris, “after a hard night, Julian woke up ... to a kind, personal message from Pope Francis @pontifex delivered to his cell door by the prison priest.” Following protocol for such private messages, the Vatican has not confirmed Moris’ report.

Elizabeth Vos (formerly of Disobedient Media) [writes](#) in *Consortium News* that the Pope should send another letter—an Easter message to Biden—demanding the freedom of Assange. She helpfully suggests a verse from Paul’s Letter to the Galatians: “Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?”