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GEOPOLITICAL ROUNDUP

IRAN: TRUMP'S "IMMINENT THREAT" CLAIM A LIE

From statements by President Trump on 3 January, it is well noted that the reason for ordering the assassination of Iranian General Qasem Soleimani was because he was an "imminent threat."

Trump tweeted: "General Qasem Soleimani has killed or badly wounded thousands of Americans over an extended period of time, and was plotting to kill many more... but got caught!"

Following up, the U.S. Defense Department issued the justification for the order to kill: "General Soleimani was actively developing plans to attack American diplomats and service members in Iraq and throughout the region."

On 9 January, Vice President Mike Pence said the administration could not provide Congress with some of the "most compelling" intelligence behind the administration's decision to kill Soleimani because doing so "could compromise" sources and methods.

The next day, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo stated, "There is no doubt that there were a series of imminent attacks that were being plotted by Qasem Soleimani."

As recent as 13 February, President Trump tweeted: "The Fake News Media and their Democrat Partners are working hard to determine whether or not the future attack by terrorist Soleimani was 'imminent' or not, & was my team in agreement. The answer to both is a strong YES."

The Big Lie and Biggest Liars

The very next day, however, in a mandated memo to Congress, the White House provided its legal rationale, which contradicted the long-stated reason for the assassination of the Soleimani being and imminent threat:

"The purposes of this action were to protect United States personnel, to deter Iran from conducting or supporting further attacks against United States forces and interests, to degrade Iran's and Quds Force-backed militias' ability to conduct attacks, and to end Iran's strategic escalation of attacks."

Responding to the memo, Eliot Engel, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, noted, "This official report directly contradicts the president's false assertion that he attacked Iran to prevent an imminent attack against United States personnel and embassies… The administration's explanation in this report makes no mention of any imminent threat and shows that the justification the president offered to the American people was false, plain and simple."

TRENDPOST: *A strong majority of Republicans and Democrats, along with the mainstream media, condoned and supported the Soleimani assassination.*

As written in the ***Trends Journal****, when Congress voted for a non-binding resolution on 9 January for the President to notify them in the future before any attacks are launched, the resolution began with the condemnation that "Iranian General Qasem Soleimani was the lead architect of much of Iran's destabilizing activities throughout the world." Again, claims and justifications for actions are taken and made without providing evidence.*

Furthermore, absent from media coverage and never admitted by Congress is that the U.S. has illegally invaded and occupies countries throughout the Middle East; has destroyed entire nations; killed millions; and has sown the seeds of revenge, thus promulgating "radical" Islamist forces.

TREND TRACKING LESSON: *The military memo was released by the administration late on Friday, 14 February, at the beginning of a three-day holiday weekend. As Gerald Celente has mentioned many times, this is known as a "news dump" strategy: politicians are aware that Saturday's papers are the least read, and people are more distracted from world events during a holiday.*

EUROPE JOINS THE BLACKLIST GANG

Immediately following the U.S. assassination of Qasem Soleimani, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo criticized Europeans for not being supportive enough of the action, stating, "Frankly, the Europeans haven't been as helpful as I wish that they could be. The Brits, the French, the Germans all need to understand that what we did, what the Americans did, saved lives in Europe as well."

Mr. Pompeo went on to praise the countries he consulted with that were supportive to the U.S. cause: Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

In an abrupt about-face, the European Union signed on with the U.S. to impose economic pressure on Iran by signing the Financial Action Task Force, which blacklists Iran by significantly reducing the number of international banks and businesses willing to have economic ties to them.

Already, U.S. sanctions on Iran have driven the nation deep into recession – their GDP has fallen over 15 percent since being posed in 2018. Oil exports have plummeted over 70 percent, currency has devalued to record lows, and inflation has skyrocketed over 40 percent.

Pompeo on the Attack

Last February, Mr. Pompeo said, “Things are much worse for the Iranian people with the U.S. sanctions, and we are convinced that will lead the Iranian people to rise up and change the behavior of the regime.”

On his trip to Saudi Arabia last week, Pompeo stated, “The pressure campaign continues. It’s not just an economic pressure campaign, it’s diplomatic pressures, isolation through diplomacy, as well.”

Responding to the U.S.-led sanctions crippling his country’s economy, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani made it clear Tehran will not re-start negotiations with the U.S. until it abandons the “maximum pressure” tactics. He said the only door toward a more peaceful relationship would be a return to 2015’s Iran nuclear deal, which Trump broke away from shortly after taking office.

President Rouhani added, “It makes no difference who will be the next (American) administration… Iran will never negotiate under pressure.”

TRENDPOST: *Mr. Pompeo has made it clear that the U.S. imposed sanctions with purpose of making the general population – the everyday people – suffer terribly, so they would overthrow the government.*

Never mentioned in the media or by Congress is the overt illegality and immorality of foreign entanglements against a nation that poses no threat to the American homeland and the dire implications its actions have on the innocent civilians of the nations they attack.

While in Saudi Arabia, Pompeo visited the Prince Sultan Air Base, home to 2,500 U.S. troops assigned to Saudi Arabia specifically to counter potential Iranian threats in the region.

Justifying the increase of U.S. troops in the country, Mr. Pompeo stated it was because the Iranians destroyed a key Saudi oil refinery last September: “No reasonable person has any doubt about where these missiles came from.”

PUBLISHER’S NOTE: *In fact, no evidence has been provided to support Pompeo’s accusations. Furthermore, Yemeni Houthis claimed responsibility for* *this drone attack, stating it was in response to the devastating bombing of Yemen by U.S.-backed Saudis, which killed over 100,000 Yemenis and, according to the United Nations, created the worst humanitarian crisis on Earth.*

SYRIA: TURKEY RAMPS UP WAR

As reported in last week's **Trends Journal**, the northwest section of Syria, which borders Turkey, has been the scene of increasing warfare between Turkish forces crossing the border to clear out Kurdish fighters and the Syrian military backed by Russia and Iran.

James F. Jeffrey, Special Representative for Syria Engagement and the Special Envoy for the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, directly accused the Russians of escalating the tension: "This is a dangerous conflict. It needs to be brought to an end. Russia needs to change its policies."

Hundreds of troops have been killed, and some 900,000 citizens have fled due to the escalating warfare. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan promised an all-out attack on Syrian government forces if Syrian President Bashar al-Assad does not pull his troops from the Idlib region.

Since last October, Turkey, assisted by an agreement from President Trump to remove American forces from the Northwest region, has sent more than 10,000 troops supported by over 2,000 tanks and military equipment across the border.

Caught in the escalating crossfire are some 500 American troops that are still in Syria, despite President Trump's declaration to remove all U.S. military personnel.

***PUBLISHER'S NOTE**: Mr. Jeffrey's statement regarding the escalating tensions exemplifies America's overt militarism, hypocrisy, and propaganda efforts.*

Russia was invited into Syria by its President, Bashar al-Assad. The United States and Turkey are foreign, illegal invaders of a sovereign nation which has posed no threat to either of them, facts ignored by the western media and their governments.

ISRAEL: BOMBS AWAY ON GAZA AND SYRIA

The ongoing Israeli/Palestinian conflict ignited again on Sunday, when a video released on social media showed an Israeli bulldozer dragging the dead body of a Palestinian they said was trying to plant an explosive next to a fence at the Gaza border.

The video also shows a number of men being shot in the legs by Israeli forces as they were trying to retrieve the bodies of two others who were killed.

The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel called for an investigation into the bulldozer event claiming the desecration of a body killed in a conflict can be considered a war crime based on international laws.

According to international law, this is a violation of human rights. The Geneva Conventions states the parties of an armed conflict must bury the deceased in an honorable way, "if possible according to the rites of the religion to which they belonged and that their graves are respected, properly maintained, and marked in such a way that they can always be recognized."

In response to the bulldozer desecration, Palestinian forces launched some 20 rockets from Gaza into Israel, causing no reported injuries or damage according to the Israeli government.

In turn, Israel responded by bombing Gaza, and launching missile attacks into Syria killing some six people.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu threatened that if more rockets were launched into Israel, “I’m talking about a war.”

Netanyahu Plan: Little Room for Palestinians

In violation of international law, last Thursday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu revealed a plan to construct over 6,000 houses in East Jerusalem, which was captured and occupied by the Israelis during 1967’s Arab-Israeli “Six-Day War.”

Peace Now, an Israeli group seeking fairer treatment of Palestinians, pointed to the construction plan as “state suicide” that would end any hope for a two-state solution.

Last Friday, France and Germany spoke out against Mr. Netanyahu’s lifting of construction limits. The French Foreign Ministry released the statement: “The expansion of these two settlements directly undermines the viability of a future Palestinian state, as the European Union has reiterated on several occasions,” and added, “All forms of settlement activity are illegal under international law.”

TRENDPOST: *The timing of Mr. Netanyahu’s announcement comes less than two weeks before a national election in which he is making strong efforts to consolidate his conservative base. Since last November, he is under the pressure of criminal indictment on charges of fraud and bribery and has twice failed in previous elections to put together a winning coalition.*

As Gerald Celente has long stated, regardless of nation or leader, “When all else fails, they take you to war.”

AFGHANISTAN: PEACE AS PREDICTED

The U.S. war in Afghanistan, now in its 19th year, the longest in American history, may be coming to an end.

In fact, Gerald Celente had forecast over a year ago that President Trump would have a peace deal with both Afghanistan and North Korea to help boost his 2020 re-election odds. Indeed, at his State of the Union address earlier this month, Trump said, “We are working to finally end America’s longest war and bring our troops back home!”

Last Saturday began a seven-day “reduction in violence” accord between the U.S. and the Taliban, which is a prelude to an anticipated agreement to be signed 29 February by which the U.S. will withdraw some 3,000 troops by summer. An agreement to withdraw all troops would then be scheduled at a later date if both sides complied with terms.

The Toll of War

The proposed peace plan comes after one of the most violent years since the war began. According to a UN report, over 10,000 civilians were killed or wounded last year. This marked the sixth consecutive year that the ongoing war cost the lives of over 10,000 people.

The Pentagon increased bombing operations in 2019 to a level greater than any other year in over a decade.

The head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) commented, “Almost no civilian in Afghanistan has escaped being personally affected in some way by the ongoing violence.”

TRENDPOST: *The ongoing war in Afghanistan has cost U.S. taxpayers over one trillion dollars. Over 2,500 U.S. soldiers have lost their lives, and an additional 20,000 have been seriously injured, many coming home physically and emotionally scarred for life. Tens of thousands of Afghan troops, Taliban fighters, and civilians have also been killed.*

Yet, throughout this nearly two decades of mass murderous bloodshed, the American people and the political class have maintained their silence and de facto acceptance of Washington’s criminal illegality, while the mainstream media barely reports on the ongoing tragedy of human suffering.

EASTERN LIBYA: LIFE UNDER EX-CIA AGENT HAFTAR

Oil-rich Libya, the African country with its strategically valuable coastline, has melted down to mayhem following Noble Peace Prize winner Barack Obama’s “Qaddafi has to go” 2011 U.S.-led war, supported by NATO, that led to the overthrow and murder of the country’s leader, Muammar Qaddafi.

As reported in the **Trends Journal**, there has been an ongoing battle between the UN-endorsed Government of National Accord (GNA) and the militia led by Khalifa Haftar, a dual Libyan-U.S. citizen and CIA agent.

Mr. Haftar, a former Qaddafi loyalist who had a falling out with Quadaffi in the late 1980s, returned to Libya during the 2011 uprising.

Last April, President Trump reversed the U.S. position of supporting the UN-endorsed GNA government, stating that he "recognized Field Marshal Haftar's significant role in fighting terrorism and securing Libya's oil resources."

As the military leader of eastern Libya, its main oil hub, Haftar has been in a six-year struggle to gain full control of the country and, over the past ten months, has tried to overtake the capital of Tripoli. He is backed with military support from Russia, Egypt, and France.

Over the past several weeks, Haftar has cut off much of Libya's oil production and broke the cease-fire agreement forged at the international conference in Berlin on 14 January. The details of that conference and agreement have been detailed in previous issues of the **Trends Journal**.

Torture and Intimidation

Libyans citizens are accusing Mr. Haftar of torture and murder and have sued him in the state of Virginia where he and his family reportedly own some $8 million worth of property.

The lawsuit in Virginia accuses Haftar and his sons of an "indiscriminate war against the Libyan people" including a wide use of torture and murder without benefit of judicial review.

Philippe Nassif, an advocacy director for Amnesty International, said, "We are documenting these abuses the best we can, but we know it is just the tip of the iceberg and there could be far more things happening, mostly in areas controlled by Haftar's forces."

PUBLISHER'S NOTE: *When the mainstream media reports on Libya, the deplorable conditions its citizens are now living in – the violence, corruption, destruction of infrastructure, and ongoing mass murder and mayhem – they avoid mentioning that when Libya was under Colonel Qaddafi's rule, the Libyan people enjoyed the highest living standard in Africa and received more benefits from the state than many advanced societies.*

Additionally, the media avoids mentioning that former UK Prime Minister David Cameron and Presidents Barack Obama and Nicolas Sarkozy of France – with the insistence of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton; U.S. Ambassador to the UN, Susan Rice; and Samantha Power, Senior Director for Multilateral Affairs and

Human Rights on the National Security Council – were the murderous maniacs responsible for death and the destruction of Libya… and for its current crisis.

VENEZUELA: U.S. LOVES REGIME CHANGE

As reported last week in the **Trends Journal**, self-proclaimed Venezuelan president Juan Guaidó, after being applauded by the U.S. congress as an honored guest of President Trump at his State of the Union Address, returned to Venezuela to face condemnation as a traitor by angry citizens when he landed at the Caracas airport.

Among the crowd were employees of Venezuela's state-run airline, Conviasa, which, just days earlier, was sanctioned by the United States… which has launched economic warfare against the ruling government it wants overthrow.

After winning the presidential election in May 2018, which was monitored by international observers, on 10 January 2019, Nicolás Maduro was sworn in. A few days later, with the support of the Trump administration, Juan Guaidó anointed himself official president of Venezuela.

But Guaidó's failed attempt to win over the country's military, along with diminished backing from its citizens, has left him without strong internal support.

Also covered in the **Trends Journal** has been Washington's increasing sanctions, which have crippled Venezuela's economy and helped cause a humanitarian crisis, with millions struggling for enough food and water and basic living necessities.

And, last week, seeking to put more economic pressure Maduro, the Trump administration – with the intention of inciting hostility among the people to help overthrow the ruling government – imposed sanctions on Rosneft Trading S.A., a Geneva-based subsidiary of the Russian state-owned oil company.

Oil comprises 95 percent of Venezuela's exports and 25 percent of its gross domestic product, and Rosneft ships more than half of all oil exported from Venezuela.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo tweeted: "Today we sanctioned Russian-owned oil firm Rosneft Trading S.A., cutting off Maduro's main lifeline to evade our sanctions on the Venezuelan oil sector. Those who prop up the corrupt regime and enable its repression of the Venezuelan people will be held accountable."

Rosneft responded, stating, "The work [with Venezuela] consists solely in ensuring that previously made payments are repaid… Repayments from Venezuela are working fully according to schedule and we will not disclose any more details."

The repayments are loans the company made to Venezuela's state-owned oil company, which are being repaid in oil deliveries. Rosneft also noted that the sanctions were selective, as they're not being levied on U.S. oil companies doing business in Venezuela.

TREND TRACKING LESSON: *As written in the* Financial Times: *"The scale of the exodus has far exceeded initial expectations, propelled by President Nicolás Maduro's mismanaged socialist revolution which has seen the oil-based economy collapse into hyperinflation."*

"Mismanaged socialist revolution?" Left unmentioned is that America has launched economic terrorism, choking off Venezuela's main export and bankrupting the country in hopes the people will launch a revolt to remove its president… who won an internationally-monitored election.

Also absent media coverage is the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights report that financial and oil sanctions imposed by the U.S. against the Venezuelan government are "exacerbating further the effects of the economic crisis and the humanitarian situation."

U.S. ECONOMIC UPDATE

STOCKS DOWN, GOLD SPIKES

The coronavirus fears, which pushed the Dow down 0.4 percent last week, continued this week sinking the Dow 1,000 points on Monday – its biggest drop in two years.

Today, the Dow closed down nearly 879 points.

Brent Crude, at $55 a barrel, is down from $59 last Thursday, as concerns grow that the virus will put more downward pressure on the already slowing global economy.

As stock markets retreated in fear of the coronavirus's global economic damage, investors took refuge in gold, which reached its highest price since 2013.

February gold prices spiked to $1,643 on Friday and hit $1,672 a troy ounce, the highest price since early 2013, yesterday before retreating to $1,650 an ounce as we go to press.

TREND FORECAST: *Gold spiked $300 an ounce since we forecast the start of the "Gold Bull Run" in our 6 June 2019 Trend Alert.*

It should be noted that for some six years, Gerald Celente has forecast that when gold prices break above $1,450 an ounce, which they finally did last summer, they would spike toward $2,000 per ounce.

Considering the rapid price rise is now being pushed by coronavirus fears, we expect gold prices to steady in the $1,550 to $1,650 per ounce range before resuming their upward rise. Our downside risk is now $1,550 per ounce.

Today, with gold down some $40 per ounce, despite the equity markets tanking, it indicates a lessening of severity of the human toll and economic impact of the coronavirus in China and globally.

FED OFFICIALS SAY INTEREST RATES WON'T FALL – WE DISAGREE

Last week, three Federal Reserve Bank officers said they see no need to lower interest rates, despite market expectations of as many as two cuts this year.

Raphael Bostic, president of Atlanta's Fed branch, said on Friday he strongly expects "that the economy is not going to see rising risks and it's going to stay stable so we won't have to do anything."

Bostic added, "If we see more weakness than expected, then I'd be open to moving. But that's not my expectation."

John Bullard, president of the St. Louis Federal Reserve, said he also sees slim chances for a rate cut unless the economy changes dramatically.

"There's a high probability that the coronavirus will blow over as other viruses have, be a temporary shock, and everything will come back," Bullard said.

On Thursday, Fed vice-chair Richard Clarida also said he doesn't expect interest rates to change.

TREND FORECAST: *Believe the markets, not the banksters.*

We continue to predict that the global slowdown will lead the Fed to cut rates to zero or into negative numbers this fall if not earlier. Central banks around the world will continue to inject monetary methadone into the markets until the banking sector becomes precarious and central banks run out of room to cut rates further. Many are close to that point already.

Indeed, even if official interest rates are well above zero or even in low double digits, considering rising inflation rates in nations such as Turkey, India, China etc., in reality, their rates are already foundering in zero-to-negative territory.

Therefore, as we have been noting, with the exception of the U.S., Canada, and a few other nations which will get a brief boost from lower rates, more quantitative easing measures and the further lowering of interest rates will neither boost sagging economies nor stall the "Greatest Depression" hitting in 2021.

SHOPPERS SITTING ON THEIR WALLETS

U.S. consumer spending rose 0.3 percent from December to January.

The increase came in sales by auto dealers, gas stations, restaurants, and home and garden supply stores.

Outside of those categories, sales were flat from month to month. Analysts had expected an increase.

Retail sales figures for last October and November have been revised downward, leading analysts to believe that December's sales also were less than have been reported.

That weaker fourth-quarter retail performance has persisted into 2020's first quarter.

U.S. factory output fared worse, falling 0.1 percent in January from December.

The weak numbers led Goldman Sachs to drop its estimate for U.S. first-quarter growth from 1.7 percent to 1.4. Barclays reduced its forecast from 1.5 percent to 1.1.

TREND FORECAST: *With crippling student debt and credit card debt poised to reach a record $1 trillion and consumer debt overall estimated at more than $14 trillion… even if the coronavirus wild card does not strike America, consumer spending will remain weak well into 2020 and will further weaken as the economic slowdown persists.*

WALMART'S WEAKER SALES MAY SIGNAL ECONOMIC TROUBLE

Walmart, the U.S.'s largest brick-and-mortar retailer, reported sales rose 1.9 percent in November, December, and January, compared with 4.2 percent during the same period a year earlier and 3.2 percent in 2019's third quarter.

Operating income dropped 3.7 percent in last year's final three months.

Holiday sales of clothing, toys, and video games were slow, the retailer said.

The chain's online sales rose 35 percent during the fourth quarter and were given an extra boost by online grocery orders.

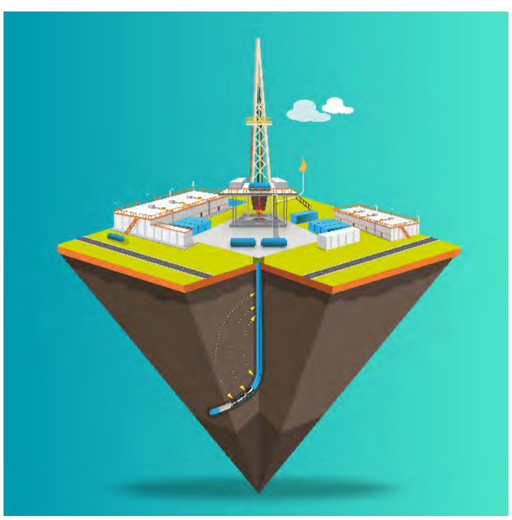
Walmart is forecasting "at least" 2.3 percent growth in fiscal 2021, compared with 2.8 percent in the most recently completed fiscal year. It expects to increase online sales and profits and also to expand its health care centers and launch online advertising sales and other new ventures.

In January, the Target big-box chain revised downward its holiday sales numbers and cut its sales forecast for 2020's first quarter.

TREND FORECAST: *Walmart's sales have been an early indicator of economic sentiment among lower- and middle-income households… the American majority. The chain's soft numbers are a sounding alarm that consumers will curtail spending, further weakening the retail pillar of the U.S. economy, which accounts for some two-thirds of the nation's GDP.*

Walmart's slowing brick-and-mortar sales also exemplify the fate of department stores trying to maintain a physical presence. Specialty retailers selling products that need hands-on installation or big-ticket delivery, such as tire stores and lumber yards, will survive as will stores offering intensive personal services. Others will face increasing pressure to automate to reduce costs.

U.S. GAS INDUSTRY GETTING "FRACKED"



Fracturing, or “fracking,” rocks deep in the Earth to release and harvest natural gas has made the U.S. an energy exporter, kept fuel prices low by pushing out more supply than there is demand, while hitting the domestic coal industry hard.

But the fracked wells’ renowned bounteous productivity has left many gas producers facing bankruptcy.

Fracked wells are expensive to drill and complete but the cost has been justified by the enormous amounts of gas the wells produce.

That has flooded U.S. gas markets, keeping prices low.

Now low gas prices have combined with a slowing economy and tight credit market just as producers of fracked gas face a collective $86 billion in loans coming due now through 2024.

Because drilling for oil and gas is a risky venture, 60 percent of that debt is ranked as “speculative grade” – closer to junk bonds than to blue-chip stocks – “implying a higher degree of default risk,” according to a 19 February statement by Moody’s ratings service.

In 2022, the speculative-grade debt coming due will peak, outnumbering safer loans by about two to one.

Low oil and gas prices, the global economic slowdown, and a cautious credit market will make it hard for producers to raise capital to drill new wells and maintain cash flow.

TRENDPOST: *The number of oil drilling rigs at work in the U.S. has risen for the third straight week. With increasing supply and lower demand, natural gas futures prices are down some 30 percent in the past year. Considering that some 50 percent of U.S. households use the fuel as their primary heating source, the savings on energy may flow into retail, restaurants, and hospitality sectors … or paying of debt.*

NOT YOUR FATHER'S CAR BUSINESS

Auto sales to people ages 35 and younger fell 4.5 percent in 2019, according to J.D. Power. In contrast, sales to those 56 and older grew 1 percent.

The difference illustrates two market shifts.

First, carmakers are making fewer small sedans and hatchbacks and are producing more SUVs and trucks, which are selling strongly while gas prices are low.

Sales of cars priced at $20,000 or less plunged 20 percent last year.

Second, those larger vehicles are more expensive, priced beyond the reach of many millennials and Generation Z-ers. Older adults generally have more savings and higher incomes to be able to afford luxury cars and $50,000 pickups.

The average new car price last year was $33,600, about $1,100 more than in 2018. New tech features helped boost the price.

The average monthly payment for a new car in 2019 was $566. Used cars carried a payment of about $415.

"The financial challenges that young consumers face are multifaceted," including student debt and high rent in many urban areas, said Tyson Jominy, J.D. Power's vice-president of data and analytics. "We can't discount the role that higher monthly new car payments and insurance play in damaging sales."

Ride-hailing services also help to dissuade young people from going into debt to buy a car.

U.S. auto sales may have peaked, dropping 1 percent last year after more than five years of growth, reaching a record 17.6 million 2016.

TRENDPOST: *Auto sales will continue to soften as younger generations, such as millennials who earn 20 percent less than boomers, make less money while falling deeper in debt.*

Indeed, the "wealth defect" is a primary motivation for younger generations solid support for Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders, who promises them a range of free government services and benefits if he wins the 2020 Presidential Reality Show.®

BROKERAGE BIGS GET BIGGER

Franklin Resources, the parent company of the Franklin Templeton mutual funds family, has bought Baltimore-based investment company Legg Mason for $4.5 billion.

Franklin offered $23 in cash for each outstanding Legg Mason share, a 23-percent premium over the trading price on 14 February. Franklin also will take on Legg Mason's $2 billion in debt.

After the sale was announced, Legg Mason's stock price surged 23.6 percent and Franklin's rose 5.1 percent.

The combination gives Franklin greater access to Legg Mason's institutional investors and expertise in bond and real estate investing and leaves Franklin less reliant on individual investors.

Legg Mason’s future is now less cloudy. It has tried to cut costs and streamline some operations, but the nine investment management firms it owns, and which operate somewhat independently, have made it difficult to push through changes.

Franklin has agreed to pay those Legg affiliates about $350 million in stock and bonuses to remain aligned with the new entity.

Both companies are seeking to adapt to an investment climate in which active customers – those paying commissions to brokers who pick stocks for them – are dwindling. They’re being replaced by independent investors making their own choices and trading over digital platforms for a few dollars per trade; or passive investors putting their money in fee-free funds, especially exchange-traded funds.

The deal has been approved by the boards of both companies and is expected to be finalized before October.

Franklin has about $698 million under management; Legg Mason has $804 million.

In the same week, Morgan Stanley paid $13 billion to acquire E-Trade Financial Corp.

The purchase moves the old-line bank squarely into the business of dealing with ordinary people as well as its usual stock-in-trade of catering to wealthy individuals and institutional investors.

Morgan Stanley has more than 15,000 staffers managing individual accounts of millionaires.

Last year, the bank opened an online financial management platform for people of more modest means. E-Trade will combine with that service, swelling it to more than eight million users and more than $3 trillion in clients’ assets.

The deal brings Morgan Stanley into competition with low-cost, online brokerage firms where customers are flocking. E-Trade gains a safe haven; competition is forcing down commission rates and trading fees across the industry and low interest rates impinged on the money E-Trade was making by investing cash sitting in customers’ accounts.

TRENDPOST: *The finance and investment industry has been roiled by clients' eagerness to abandon paid advisory services and put their money with discount and fee-free brokers or "set and forget" funds. Investment firms also are uncertain about digital currencies' future effects on their industry.*

The global economic slowdown underway and a possible looming recession would worsen the plight of high-cost firms.

Look for additional mergers, takeovers, and consolidations among old-line brokerage houses as they seek to compete with online trading platforms.

DOMINO'S KNOWS: FORGET THE "HEALTHY FOOD" HYPE

Last week, Domino's Pizza reported $129.3 million in profits in 2019's fourth quarter on revenue of $1.15 billion. Sales were up 3.4 percent during the period, topping expectations of 2.3 percent.

The chain's share price rose 26 percent after the figures were released.

Domino's is one of the few fast-food chains to refuse to work with delivery services such as Grubhub and DoorDash. Said CEO Ritch Allison, "Delivery services charge too much and break the direct relationship between Domino's and its customers."

Instead, Domino's is investing in technology to speed deliveries and is opening more stores to cut delivery times.

The pizza chain also reported that carryout orders now make up about half its sales, compared to a third eight years ago.

TRENDPOST: *While the mainstream media continue to promote the hype of how Americans are concerned about what they eat and are going all natural and organic, as we have documented with hard numbers and indisputable facts, the vast majority are devouring lower quality foods and gaining more weight.*

GLOBAL ECONOMIC UPDATE

OECD WARNS ABOUT CORPORATE DEBT

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the global group of 36 major nations, has issued a warning about the swift increase of corporate debt around the world and the dangers it poses if interest rates rise or a recession takes hold.

By the end of 2019, outstanding corporate bonds held by companies outside the financial industry totaled $13.5 trillion worth of debt, matching a record set in 2016.

Since 2008, the average annual bond issue has been $1.8 trillion, twice the average from 2000 through 2007.

High debt has been cited as a cause of the Great Recession in 2008. The debt load is much higher now.

The report cited central banks' policies of low interest rates and quantitative easing as a prime reason for the $2.1 trillion in corporate bond debt added in 2019.

The OECD also cautioned that the current basket of bonds “has lower overall rating quality, higher payback requirements, longer maturities, and inferior investor protection” than normal.

Since 2010, about 20 percent of bonds issued have been junk bonds or “non-investment grade.” The proportion rose to 25 percent in 2019.

Bonds rated BBB, which is barely above junk-bond status, now make up 51 percent of outstanding corporate bonds, compared to 39 percent from 2000 to 2007.

In 2019, only 30 percent of the bonds were rated A or better.

The OECD noted this is the longest period since the 1980s’ junk-bond craze that the proportion of low-grade bonds has been so high. This signals that “default rates in a future downturn are likely to be higher than in previous credit cycles.”

Also, more bonds now have longer times to maturity, making them susceptible to rising interest rates.

As interest rates rise, bond values fall.

Angel Gurria, the OECD’s secretary-general, said the bond burden demands market reforms that include “the ability of equity markets to strengthen corporate balance sheets and support long-term investments.”

The OECD study reviewed data on more than 92,000 corporate bonds issued in 114 countries from 2000 through 2019.

A report to the G20 group of nations, made public last month, sounded a similar alarm.

It warned of risks to the world’s financial system of “an unexpected and unplanned reversal of abundant global liquidity.” If one central bank shuts off the cheap-money spigot, the report added, there could be “strong contagion” to other countries.

“The supply of private liquidity cannot be relied upon in periods of stress,” the report noted and public supplies – IMF reserves, government bailouts, and other sources of last resort – are likely to be inadequate.

TREND FORECAST: *The dominos may be beginning to fall. Last week, Fitch and S&P ratings services downgraded Kraft Heinz's $21 billion in bonds from BBB to junk status.*

The OECD pointed out that the reason for the record debt load and rising risk is that central banks have enforced artificially low interest rates. Corporations have used that cheap money to buy their own stocks, boosting the price and fattening executive bonuses.

*As **Trends Journal** subscribers have known for a long time, the rising stock market isn't the result of underlying value but comes from the decades long drip of monetary methadone that central banks, i.e., money junkies, sell to addict gamblers on the Street, also known as "investors."*

Despite our forecast for continued lowering of interest rates, which, in effect, will somewhat ease corporate debt loads, as the "Greatest Depression" sets in and businesses and industries contract, the bankruptcy crisis will intensify.

CORONAVIRUS CRASHES AIRLINE REVENUES

Airlines around the world have cancelled thousands of flights to or through China, and some Asian carriers report to be near failure from the loss of revenue.

In recent years, China has become the world's second largest airline market, behind the U.S. Many airlines added routes and staff and bought more planes to service that market.

Now air travel in and to China has disappeared, with more than 25,000 flights a week canceled.

The Hong Kong-based Cathay Pacific Airways has asked all staff to take three weeks' unpaid leave; South Korea's Asiana Airlines also has furloughed workers without pay. Hong Kong Airlines Ltd. has fired 400 people.

Thai Airways has cut flights linking Bangkok, Seoul, and Singapore. Quantas Airlines in Australia has reduced flights to Hong Kong and Singapore and suspended flights to mainland China through April.

The damage is spreading to other travel sectors; Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings Ltd. has canceled its slate of Asian cruises until October.

HSBC CUTS JOBS, STOCK PRICE DIPS

HSBC, Europe's largest bank with $2.5 billion in assets, is cutting 35,000 jobs and dumping $100 billion in riskier investments by the end of 2022.

The bank is shrinking its lending in Europe by 35 percent and in the U.S. by 45 percent, while redirecting those assets to higher-growth areas mainly in Asia, where it is also relocating some operations from London.

To conserve cash, the bank will stop buying back its own shares but will continue to pay stock dividends.

The move is one of the most thorough restructurings in the bank's 155-year history, according to Noel Quinn, interim CEO.

The stock market greeted the 19 February announcement by knocking 6 percent off HSBC's share price.

TRENDPOST: *Europe's banks are struggling to find ways to survive in a prolonged era of low or negative interest rates. Last year, the troubled Deutsche Bank revealed a plan to cut 18,000 jobs worldwide.*

TREND FORECAST: *Negative interest rates in Europe and Japan will continue to deepen the banking sector's turmoil. More banks will take increasingly drastic steps to shrink staff, consolidate operations, or merge. Some big names will be bought out… and others, including the "too big to fail," will go under when the "Greatest Depression" strikes in 2021.*

NO EUROPEAN REBOUND: EURO SINKING

It was bad economic news before coronavirus fears took center stage this month. Europe's fourth quarter 2019 growth rate of 0.1 percent has crushed hopes that some analysts held for an economic rebound.

The rate was the slowest since early 2013.

The sag deepened with retail sales falling 1.6 percent in December, the sector's weakest performance in ten years.

The job market, however, ticked up by 0.3 percent, perhaps reflecting holiday seasonal hiring.

Germany's economy showed no growth during 2019's final quarter, in part because 7 percent of Germany's exports are sold to China, which has shut stores and factories during the coronavirus epidemic. The exports accounted for 2.8 percent of Germany's entire GDP in 2018.

Deutsche Bank estimates the viral epidemic will take 0.2 percent from Germany's first quarter growth this year, sending the country into a "technical recession."

A key measure of the sentiment for Germany's economic outlook fell from a cautious 26.7 in December to a seriously worried 8.7 in January, helping to drive the euro to its weakest measure against the dollar since April 2017.

The euro fell an additional 0.4 percent against the dollar on 18 February, leaving it at just under $1.08.

The yield on Germany's ten-year bond edged up from -0.436 percent to -0.408 on 17 February.

As the euro fell further, the Stoxx Europe 600 stock index rose 4.8 percent this month and the S&P 500 is up 4.5 percent since January.

The Stoxx index is trading in record high territory, and the interest rate on Greek bonds fell to 1 percent, its lowest ever.

Markets are buoyed by the continued belief that central banks will keep interest rates at rock bottom or in negative territory.

The European Central Bank will meet on 12 March to review its forecast for growth and inflation.

Some analysts think the ECB might cut rates from -0.5 percent to -0.6 percent, but most are confident the bank will hold rates steady.

Goldman Sachs predicts another rate cut is unlikely but added, "We do not discount the possibility that the bank would respond with monetary easing should the coronavirus affect business sentiment and financial conditions."

TREND FORECAST: *The growing distance between stock prices and the economic reality of the falling euro is a measure of investors' faith that central banks will be able to keep maneuvering economies safely through hard times. With ECB rates at -0.5 percent, however, the central bank is reaching the end of its ability to keep economic reality at bay.*

Neither lowering of interest rates, quantitative easing, or calls for fiscal stimulus will generate significant economic growth in a moderate slowdown and will totally fail to reverse the dire implications of the oncoming "Greatest Depression."

GERMAN COMPANIES WARN OF FALLING PROFITS

More than 300 of Germany's leading companies issued more than 170 negative forecasts for profits and sales in 2019, a record number, according to professional services firm Ernst & Young (EY).

The number is 25 percent greater than in 2018 and the most since 2012, when EY began keeping records.

Chemical firm BASF and automakers Daimler and Continental were among those with gloomy outlooks.

The companies cut their profit targets by an average of 37 percent. That included ten of the country's top 12 automakers and car parts suppliers.

The downturns result from a slowing global car market, U.S.-China trade turmoil, and now the coronavirus, which has shut off international parts supply lines.

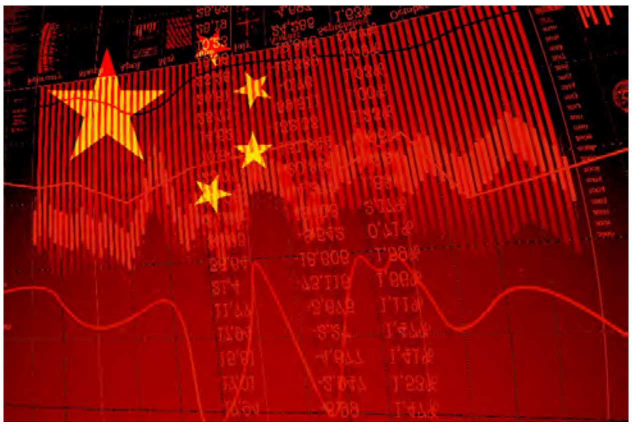
Europe's car market, and Germany's in particular, shrank by 7.5 percent in January.

The contraction reduces German car companies' resources needed to make the planned transition to electric vehicles.

TRENDPOST: *Again, it is important to note that these numbers preceded the coronavirus implications. Therefore, considering that virus fallout will hit global* *profits much harder in the first quarter, the economic slowdown of 2019 will worsen in 2020.*

Furthermore, considering the current tenuous economic climate, should a wild card/black swan event such as worsening coronavirus, wars, natural disasters, etc. occur, overvalued equity markets will crash and global economies will sink toward the "Greatest Depression."

CHINA: RATES FALL, DEFAULTS EXPECTED TO RISE



China's banks have cut the prime rate on one-year loans to 4.05 percent, down 0.10 percent. The cut had been expected as the government is taking measures to stimulate the economy in the midst of the continuing economic slowdown, now worsened by the coronavirus epidemic.

S&P Global Ratings has warned that the ongoing, long-term decline could leave banks holding as much as $1.1 trillion in bad loans.

S&P also warns if the virus doesn't peak until April, China's 2020 growth rate could slow to 4.4 percent, but if it peaks in March, the growth rate could hit 5 percent.

Both mark a sharp drop from last year's 6.1-percent pace which, while a strong number compared to Europe and U.S., China's GDP rate was at a 29-year low.

To date, the Chinese government says there are 77,600 confirmed coronavirus cases and 2,663 died from the disease. The number of new cases in China dropped dramatically in recent days outside the province, which is at the center of the epidemic.

Last week, Chen Yulu, a deputy governor of the People's Bank of China, said economic damage from the virus "will not last long," stating that "the sound fundamentals of China's economy in the medium and long term remain unchanged."

The Chinese government has "sufficient policy space" and a "rich policy tool kit" to cope with the faltering economy, he added.

He also noted that the bank has maintained normal monetary policy instead of delving into negative interest rates and has enacted more than 30 policy measures to see small and medium-size businesses, manufacturing, private enterprises, and troubled banks through the virus crisis.

The Chinese economy "will recover rapidly," he predicted.

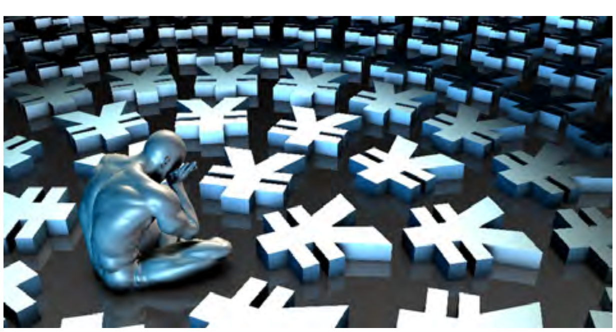
TREND FORECAST: *We forecast that Chen is wrong.*

China's interest rates are in negative territory. Considering the January 2020 inflation rate in China ranged at 5.40 percent, with their rates at 4.04 percent, they are, in fact, deep in negative territory. To push economic growth, the government will continue to lower rates, provide subsidies, and inject funds into banks and businesses in efforts forestall deeper meltdowns.

Already trapped in stagflation, China's monetary and fiscal stimulus programs will push the nation deeper into debt, pushing inflation higher while weakening their currency, the yuan.

Thus, the government will do what they can to stop currency outflows, as those with money and investment seek safe haven currencies and assets such as gold.

JAPAN: POISED FOR RECESSION AS "ABENOMICS" FAILS, YEN WEAKENS



Following his 2013 election, Japan's prime minister Shinzo Abe announced his "three arrows" of change to lead the country away from sluggish economic performance and periodic deflation.

The arrows included the central bank's large-scale "quantitative easing" scam to purchase government and corporate bonds; flexibility in tax rates and government spending; and reforms to spark greater private investment.

But, as we detailed in the **Trends Journal**, when the three arrows were fired back then, they would miss their targets, growth would remain subpar, and then continue to decline.

Screw the People

Japan's economy shrank 6.3 percent in 2019's fourth quarter after the government again increased the nation's value-added tax, this time from 8 percent to 10, forcing consumers to cut back spending.

The tax increase was targeted to shrink the budget deficit and support care for Japan's elderly, with 28 percent of the population now 65 or older.

The tax shock, coupled with the slowing global economy and now the coronavirus outbreak, has set Japan on a path to recession, defined as two consecutive quarters of economic contraction. Furthermore, the two consumption tax increases have canceled out any benefit of economic stimulus under Abe, and his overall tenure is marked by contraction, not growth.

TREND FORECAST: *Abe's administration and the central bank will take steps and invent new measures to boost the economy with both monetary and fiscal stimulus, thus putting more downward pressure on the yen… which was considered a safe-haven asset when other currencies become risky.*

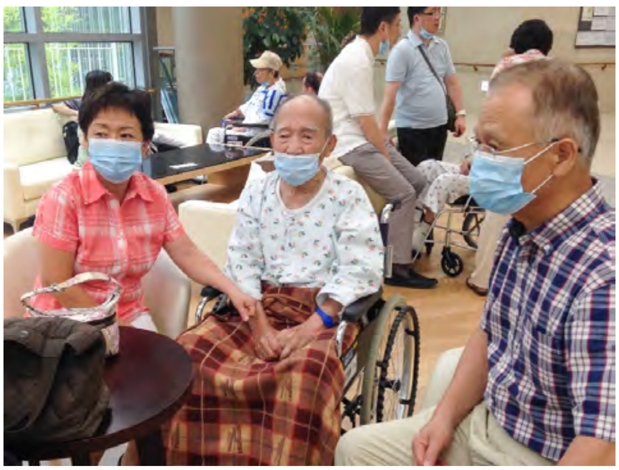
We forecast measures taken by the government and the central banks will be minimal. Abe's latest stimulus program has just been approved by the legislature and hasn't taken effect yet. It is unlikely any additional measures would be enacted soon or have an effect until summer at the earliest.

While there are high expectations for the Bank of Japan to add more short-term energy to the economy by lowering rates, the overnight rate, now at -0.1 percent, is already in negative territory. Haruhiko Kuroda, the bank's governor, said he is reluctant to cut further for fear of damaging banks.

Kuroda also said he doesn't expect Japan's 2020 growth rate to fall "far below" 2019's but that the bank would expand bond-buying "without hesitation" if needed.

Again, as we have forecast, these measures will do little or nothing to spur economic growth to push the nation out of recession. And, the more money being pumped into the system, the weaker the yen will grow and the faster inflation will rise.

SOUTH KOREA'S ECONOMY GETS THE VIRUS



South Korea must take "emergency steps" and "all possible measures we can think of" to keep its China-dependent economy from crashing during the region's coronavirus outbreak, president Moon Jae-in said last week.

"The current situation is more serious than we thought," he noted.

The country has begun a $356-million emergency loan program to support retailers, airlines, shipping companies, and travel agencies hit by the sudden plunge in Chinese business.

China buys about 25 percent of South Korea's exports, and many South Korean industries rely on parts from China. Hyundai Motor is suffering from lack of Chinese-made components.

Analysts see the virus's impact as cutting South Korea's economic growth rate to less than 2 percent this year.

The government issued a health “red alert” on 23 February after confirming more than 600 domestic cases of the illness.

TRENDPOST: *South Korea, Asia’s fourth-largest economy, joins its neighbors in facing a viral economic crisis.*

Japan, which also depends on trade with China, saw its economy shrink 6 percent in 2019 before the virus added another burden. The sudden loss of Chinese trade probably will tip Japan into recession, analysts say.

Singapore has begun subsidizing jobs in affected industries as well as offering corporate tax rebates and special props for aviation, travel, and tourism.

China’s central bank has cut its interest rates and implemented other measures to help its own businesses endure the crisis.

Overall, the harder the virus hits and the more money pumped into financial systems and economies to prop them up, the lower currencies will fall and the higher gold prices will rise.

SWEDEN: TIME TO MOVE BEYOND NEGATIVE INTEREST RATES

Sweden’s central bank has ended its five-year experiment with negative interest rates, raising its repo rate from -0.25 percent to zero on 20 February.

Other tools will be needed to guide economies through the coming global downturn, says Stefan Ingves, the bank’s governor.

Because negative interest rates put banking systems in jeopardy, government spending and asset-buying by central banks will have to play a larger part in any economic rescue, Ingves added.

In February 2015, Sweden's Riksbank dropped its interest rate to -0.1 percent. Bank officials now say that inflation is not a danger and that the economy is slowing after a several years of unusually strong growth, so negative rates are no longer needed.

TRENDPOST*: Sweden's reversal reflects the growing belief among central bankers that negative interest rates are less and less useful. More bankers are calling for governments to take on the task of economic management through borrowing and spending.*

"Monetary policy cannot, and should not, be the only game in town," said Christine Lagarde, president of the European Central Bank. "Other policy areas, notably fiscal and structural policies, also have to play their part."

Jerome Powell, chair of the U.S. Federal Reserve, said, "The current low interest rate environment means that it would be important for fiscal policy to help support the economy if it weakens."

TURKEY DROPS INTEREST RATES AGAIN

Turkey's central bank cut interest rates for the sixth time in a row, dropping its repo rate from 11.25 percent to 10.75.

With inflation clocked at 12.15 percent, the real interest rate – the difference between the interest rate and inflation – is -1.40 percent.

President Tayyip Erdoğan is pressuring the bank to bring interest rates to single digits in hopes of restarting the robust, credit-fueled growth that characterized the economy in recent years.

Analysts worry that lower interest rates will worsen inflation and the government's annual deficit and further weaken the Turkish lira, which closed down 0.2 percent against the dollar after the latest rate cut was announced.

Erdoğan – who recently has tightened his control over the bank – holds the view, contradicted by history, that high interest rates cause inflation.

His goal is to bring interest and inflation down into single digits this year.

Goldman Sachs analysts expect the central bank to gradually edge rates down into single digits, perhaps a quarter-point at a time, but warned there's little room to cut rates much more while inflation is high. Lower rates also make the lira's volatility a "key risk," the analysts said.

ARGENTINA: FLAT BROKE

It "is not economically nor politically feasible" for Argentina to fully repay its more than $100 billion foreign debt, according to the International Monetary Fund.

Creditors will need to make a "meaningful contribution" to help end the country's financial turmoil, the IMF added.

Private creditors will be expected to write off some portion of what's owed them. Governments and international agencies will be under pressure to forgive the debts.

Argentina’s public debt now exceeds 90 percent of its GDP.

Argentina’s troubles began to sharpen in 2015, when then-president Mauricio Macri ended currency controls in response to inflation, allowing Argentinians to buy and sell foreign currencies without restriction. As a result, the peso lost 30 percent of its value.

Inflation didn’t abate and now exceeds 50 percent per year.

In 2018, bondholders lost confidence in the government’s ability to repay $100 billion in debt. The IMF and other agencies extended credit, but the troubles have only worsened.

Earlier this month, vice president Cristina de Kirchner said the country would “not pay even half a cent” toward its foreign debt until Argentina ended its financial crisis.

An IMF team is working with the government to find a solution.

AFRICA: LOOKING BLEAK

Africa’s resource-centered economy has become another a victim of the coronavirus.

China’s virus epidemic has shut off about 900,000 barrels of daily use in that country, weakening oil prices.

That prompted the IMF to cut its 2020 growth forecast for Nigeria’s oil-based economy from 2.5 percent to 2.0 percent.

Nigeria is Africa’s largest economy.

China also accounts for 95 percent of South Sudan's export revenue and 61 percent of Angola's, both in oil; and 58 percent of Eretria's as zinc and copper. Cobalt shipments to China comprise 45 percent of the Democratic Republic of Congo's export income.

African exports to China grew 20 percent in 2018 but only 2.2 percent in 2020, due in part to the December virus outbreak but more widely attributable to China's slowing economy.

TREND FORECAST: *The world is on the brink of the "Greatest Depression." Considering the low level of reported coronavirus deaths, we are not in the camp that the virus will become a global pandemic. Should it worsen, however, the toll will be devastating, bringing down economies that have already been on the brink or recession/depression, which were artificially propped up with cheap money.*

TRENDS-EYE VIEW

PRESIDENTIAL REALITY SHOW®: BERNIE SHINES, MONEY TALKS

Senator Bernie Sanders, who tied for first in the Iowa Caucus and won the New Hampshire primary, scored impressively in the Nevada caucus last Saturday. He earned more than twice the votes of second place finisher Joe Biden, with Pete Buttigieg and Elizabeth Warren finishing third and fourth.

Senator Sanders has by far the most enthusiastic following, particularly among young voters and the important Hispanic community. He is better financed than Vice President Biden, Mayor Buttigieg, Senator Warren, and Senator Amy Klobuchar.

Sanders' potentially strongest opponent for the nomination was expected by many political analysts to be former New York City billionaire Michael Bloomberg, who is spending more than $1 million every day on Facebook ads alone and hundreds of millions overall.

But after his lackluster debate performance last Wednesday, the shine on Mr. Bloomberg has faded. Despite being well prepped by staffers, Bloomberg appeared passive and then grumpy after receiving sharp rebukes, particularly from Senator Warren, who referred to him on stage as "a billionaire who calls women fat broads and horse-faced lesbians."

Money Talks

Having spent $500,000 in advertising since he announced his candidacy in late November, billionaire Bloomberg, despite his poor debate performance, is currently polling ahead of the other candidates in Florida, and he tied for the lead in Virginia.

TRENDPOST: *As we forecast in last week's* ***Trends Journal****, Bernie Sanders, minus a wild card event, will win the Democratic nomination and also has a shot at defeating Donald Trump in the race for the White House.*

And while the Trump campaign will relentlessly attack Sander's "Democratic-Socialist" agenda, one weakness that may damage Sanders is a backlash for refusing to release his medical records regarding his heart attack last October.

When asked if he would release them, Sanders said, "I don't think we will, no."

Therefore, with Election Day eight months away, working the campaign trail, a grueling, non-stop job, more health issues may take a toll on the 78-year-old Sanders.

HI-TECH SCIENCE

SWITZERLAND SUSPENDS 5G DEPLOYMENT

by Bennett Davis

Switzerland, one of the first countries to begin deploying a 5G telecommunications network, has halted progress on the initiative "indefinitely" due to widespread public concerns about its health effects.

The country installed more than 2,000 5G antennas in 2019 and has been promising its population "imminent" access to the speedier, more capacious Internet access 5G makes possible.

5G technology uses higher-frequency signals than 4G, allowing them to carry more data in the same time period and with smaller antennas. But 5G signals are weaker than those of previous wifi technologies, so antennas have to be built close to users.

Many cities envision 5G antennas affixed on every street corner, office building, and residential block.

Because 5G networks could expose people to a 24-hour barrage of concentrated data waves beamed from close by, there has been growing public concern about the lack of definitive data on 5G's possible health effects.

Popular referendums are being proposed in Switzerland to regulate 5G. One would make telecom companies legally liable for claims of health damage caused by the antennas unless the companies can prove otherwise. Another would give local residents the power to refuse 5G construction in their neighborhoods.

Corporations and government agencies point to tests showing that the more concentrated 5G data waves have shown no adverse health effects in animal tests. They also note that 5G radiation levels fall within current safety guidelines.

Other researchers point to studies indicating that cell phones left on constantly in close contact with the head or body can cause cancers and other disruptions to human tissue. They argue the effects of constant, close-range 5G radiation hasn't been studied.

The Swiss government has taken notice. Bafu, its environmental agency, holds authority to set safety criteria for radio emissions. It has sent a letter to the country's cantons calling a time-out on the technology's use.

The agency said it can't draft reliable safety criteria without further testing that "will take some time," partly because no universal criteria have been established by others.

The Swiss Medical Association also urges caution about 5G, noting unanswered questions about its potential to harm the human nervous system or cause of cancers.

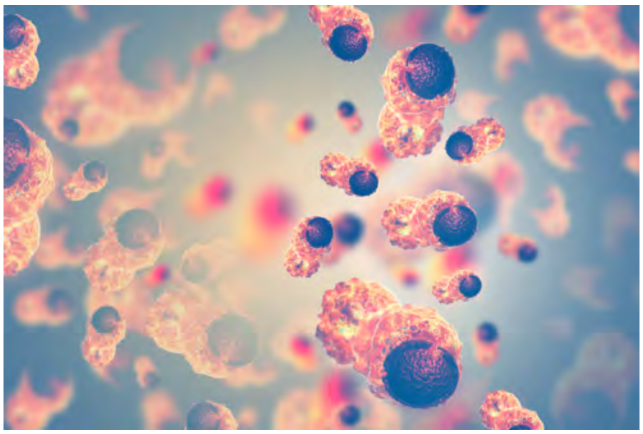
Swisscom, the nation's largest mobile phone company, responded, "There is no evidence that antenna radiation within the limit values adversely affects human health." It added that Switzerland's safety limits were "ten times stricter than those recommended by the World Health Organization."

TRENDPOST: *There are more than enough reasons to suspend 5G deployment in any location until definitive tests confirm fears of short- and long-term health damage or lay them to rest. Corporate interests will fight delays, as will a large proportion of eager potential users, and those interests are likely to fend off deployment delays in places such as the U.S. where corporations dominate political and regulatory decisions.*

Also, corporations already have sunk billions into developing and building the technology and adapting appliances to use it. They will not let go of that investment.

Early 5G adopters will be lab rats in a mass experiment. Even if users begin to show side effects, large tech companies will fight and delay any slowdown in rolling out 5G across nations.

RESEARCHERS FIND CANCER'S ACHILLES' HEEL



by Bennett Davis

Every kind of cancer is different and each different kind can have a variety of expressions, depending on the individual who has it.

That means every kind of cancer demands a different approach to treatment.

Now scientists at Cardiff University have found a way to disrupt a key component shared by a wide variety of cancers.

Without harming healthy tissue, this new process has been able to kill blood, bone, breast, cervical, colon, kidney, lung, ovarian, prostate, and skin cancer cells.

This has been thought impossible until now.

The new technique is a form of T-cell therapy, in which T-cells from a patient's immune system are collected and re-engineered in a lab to attack cancer cells, then injected back into the patient's body. The new T-cells zero in on the body's "human leukocyte antigen system," or HLA, through which they lock onto cancer cells and start to kill them.

But sometimes they don't. T-cell therapy can fail as much as half the time and scientists aren't always sure why. The HLA is unique to each person and T-cell treatment has been likened to lock-picking, which depends on wiggling the right tool into the right slot in the right way.

The Cardiff researchers used a different T-cell that skips the HLA and locks onto a different protein network on cancer cell surfaces, called MR1.

The advantage: unlike the HLA, the MR1 system doesn't vary between persons. It's identical in every one of us, which means that it's an identical component in every kind of cancer.

The Cardiff treatment bypasses cancer's usual defenses and attacks cancer's Achilles' heel – a key element present in the same way in every version of the disease.

TRENDPOST: *Animal, and then human, trials are being planned. The developers are likely to ask for fast-track approval for the new treatment if the trials show positive results.*

PULLING ELECTRICITY OUT OF THE AIR

by Bennett Davis

A special strain of bacteria can generate electricity from air, scientists at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst have discovered.

It's long been known that several kinds of bacteria can move electrons from their bodies to the ground, metal compounds, or other bacteria along protein filaments that stick out of their bodies. The filaments are about a tenth the diameter of a human hair.

Scientists aren't sure how the bugs do it and have tried for years without success to devise a way to turn these short bursts of electricity into a steady current that could be collected and used.

Two years ago, the Amherst researchers noticed that the bugs' "nanowires" were generating current spontaneously. They varied possible causes – temperature, light, and the kinds of metal making up the electrodes that the filaments were in contact with. Finally, they settled on water vapor in the air: the amount of electricity the bugs generated varied as the humidity changed.

The trick was to create a film of the protein nanowires sandwiched between metal electrodes. One electrode is shorter than the other and the ends of the filaments stick out past it and are exposed to air.

As the protein filaments absorb moisture, water droplets moving in and out of the filaments separate into hydrogen and oxygen ions – charged particles. The charge difference between the filament surfaces and the metal electrodes causes the charged particles to flow, making an electric current.

The self-recharging arrangement produces about half a volt of electricity per square centimeter of surface continuously for as long as 20 hours.

The scientists have named their device the Air-Gen and are mulling ways to scale it up to commercial size while further refining the technology.

Meanwhile, they're working on a wearable Air-Gen patch to power implanted medical devices.

TRENDPOST: *All living things generate electricity internally. Drawing that electricity out of a living organism and into a circuit is the ultimate form of clean, renewable power.*

The Amherst lab has developed other applications for bio-generated electricity and will help to inaugurate a new research and development field of protein-based electronics.