



PERSPECTIVES

THE BEGIN-SADAT CENTER FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES

BESA's Top Ten of 2020

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: During 2020, the BESA Center consolidated its position as the globally most widely read Israeli think tank in its field, with page views growing twofold to nearly 3.5 million. Below are the ten most widely read articles published in 2020. The selections reflect strong reader interest in the COVID-19 pandemic and its origin, great-power rivalries, and Israel's national security and relations with the Arab world.

1. [China and Viruses: The Case of Dr. Xiangguo Qiu](#) – Lt. Col. (res.) Dr. Dany Shoham discusses the July 2019 eviction of a group of Chinese virologists from the Canadian National Microbiology Laboratory (NML) on suspicion of espionage, following the dispatch of a shipment containing two exceptionally virulent viruses—Ebola and Nipah—from the NML to China.
2. [What Really Happened at the Port of Beirut?](#) – Lt. Col. (res.) Dr. Mordechai Kedar argues that while the Lebanese authorities blamed the massive August 2020 explosion at the Beirut port, which killed at least 135 people and wounded at least 5,000, on mismanagement by port officials, there is good reason to suspect it was the result of Hezbollah negligence.
3. [Where Did COVID-19 Really Come From?](#) – Lt. Col. (res.) Dr. Dany Shoham argues that both science and intelligence will contribute to uncovering the evidence needed to answer conclusively the hotly debated and highly consequential question of the true genomic origin and direct source of the initial SARS-CoV-2 strain that infected Patient Zero in China, an event that ultimately unleashed COVID-19 on the world to devastating effect.
4. [Israel Will Miss Sultan Qaboos of Oman](#) – Dr. Edy Cohen applauds the late sultan as a rare leader who did not let prevailing anti-Israel trends draw him

into the Arab-Israeli conflict, and hopes his successor will be wise enough to follow in his father's footsteps.

5. [Israel's Strikes in Syria Hurt Iran's Purse](#) – **Prof. Hillel Frisch** argues that Israel's relentless air campaign to prevent Iran's military entrenchment and the establishment of an Iranian-run weapons armament industry in Syria has forced Tehran to take these projects underground. That is an expensive proposition—and all the more difficult following the reimposition of US sanctions.
6. [The Fauda Effect: Israeli Active Defense on the Screen](#) – **Dr. Asaf Romirowsky** shows how Israel's active defense ethos is reflected in Israeli film- and TV-making.
7. [Five Reasons Why the West Will Lose Turkey](#) – **Dr. Emmanuel Karagiannis** argues that the Turkey we once knew no longer exists, with President Erdoğan behaving like a bully toward NATO and the EU, acquiring advanced anti-aircraft weapons from Russia, and using the plight of Muslim refugees and migrants to extort vast sums of money from the Europeans. He has also issued direct threats to Greece and regularly antagonizes Israel.
8. [Expect a War Between Russia and China in the 2020s](#) – **Pravin R. Jethwa** claims that notwithstanding the seeming friendship between Chinese president Xi Jinping and Russian president Vladimir Putin, and the growing congruence of both countries' interests in undermining the US-led international order, relations between Russia and China remain at their core as brittle and prone to mutual suspicion and distrust as they ever were.
9. [The Quadruple Threat: North Korea, China, Pakistan, and Iran](#) - **Lt. Col. (res.) Dr. Dany Shoham** argues that the vast uninterrupted territory that contains North Korea, China, Pakistan, and Iran has greater geostrategic importance today than ever before. Of the two outermost countries of that territory, an anonymous senior US administration official recently said, "Iran and North Korea have resumed cooperation in the framework of a project on long-range missiles that includes the transfer of core components."
10. [Russia Will Likely Collapse from the Inside](#) – **Emil Advaliani** argues that Russia is historically prone to internal collapse, which usually takes place as Russia is resting on the laurels of recent military victories while internal economic and social troubles grow. History teaches that the best way to deal with Russia is to keep intervention to a minimum and wait for its internal troubles to bring about its collapse.