

WIN WITHOUT WAR



Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

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SL: How the media is failing us on Iran

EVEN A HEADLINE CAN WIPE OUT TRUMP'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE CURRENT IRAN CRISIS

The U.S. media's role in helping George W. Bush sell the war in Iraq is well known -- uncritically reporting administration claims, reporting leaked intelligence at face value without skepticism, and, in the context of the aftermath of 9/11, generally accepting the notion that Saddam Hussein was affiliated with al-Qaeda and needed to go.

Troublingly, with a [few notable exceptions](#), we're seeing some of the same patterns emerge in coverage of the Trump administration's march to war with Iran, particularly throughout the past two months. In that time, Trump, led by National Security Advisor John Bolton and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, has pushed the United States to the brink of war with an unnecessary military build-up in the region and a crushing sanctions regime that has forced the Iranian government into a corner with exit ramps that only lead to more confrontation. Given the media's coverage of these events, a casual news consumer might be led to believe that Iran provoked Team Trump into action, when in reality the reverse is true.

RELAYING INTEL WITHOUT SCRUTINY

Soon after Bolton announced in early May that the U.S. would be sending more military assets to the region to confront Iran, a whole host of mainstream outlets [simply repeated administration claims](#) about the purported threat it was responding to, thus helping Trump, Bolton, and Pompeo justify their needlessly aggressive moves. Of course we later learned that their Iran threat claims were blown out of proportion and that any new Iranian military posturing was actually in response to U.S. moves, not the other way around.

PORTRAYING IRAN AS THE AGGRESSOR

It's indisputable that the Iranian government has been living up to its end of the nuclear deal, thus providing no pretext for the Trump administration's confrontational policy. Yet the many in the media — particularly after the recent attacks on oil tankers in the Gulf of Oman and Iran shooting down an American drone — are leaving out the context that the current crisis is being

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driven entirely by the Trump administration and instead misleadingly depicting Iran as the original aggressor.

“In subtle and [not-so-subtle](#) ways,” a [piece](#) in the Columbia Journalism Review noted earlier this month, “Iran is too often framed as a menacing, unilateral aggressor whose actions necessitate a strong American response. The truth is a whole lot more complicated.”

Indeed, in headline after headline, mainstream media outlets accept and [repeat the Trump administration line](#). For example, in stories about Iran threatening to abandon some limits on uranium enrichment set out by the nuclear deal, many outlets [portray that news](#) as if Iran is “violating” the deal simply because they’re bad people and want to build a bomb, not because the U.S. violated it first and reimposed sanctions that prevent Iran from achieving any economic benefits from the deal. If anything, the Iranians should be commended for holding out this long and remaining in compliance with the nuclear agreement.

LETTING FALSE CLAIMS FLY BY

Another way the media — namely on cable news entertainment and other broadcast networks — helps the Trump administration sell its Iran policy is by allowing false claims about Iran and its nuclear program to go unchallenged.

On a [recent edition](#) of CBS’s Face the Nation, Pompeo spent the better part of the interview trashing the nuclear agreement, and not once did the interviewer note that it has been working to block Iran from building a nuclear weapon.

Similarly, Trump ally Sen. John Barrasso [claimed recently](#) on CNN that Iran’s “stated goal” is to develop nuclear weapons and that Iran is currently “pursuing a nuclear weapon.” Not one time did the CNN host note that Iran’s actual stated policy is to never develop nuclear weapons (which is actually codified in the Iran deal), that according to U.S. intelligence, Iran stopped its nuclear weapons program nearly two decades ago, or that in fact, because of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, we can verify that Iran is not building nuclear weapons.

ACTIVELY CALLING FOR WAR

Many of those who helped cheerlead us into the Iraq war still hold high perches in some of the most prestigious U.S. media outlets, so we shouldn’t be too surprised that they’re [doing it again](#) with Iran. At the same time, defense industry lobbyists are going on TV and writing op-eds calling for war [without their affiliations being disclosed](#).

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And the pro-Iran war machine is in high gear over at the president's propaganda news outlet, [promoting Trump's failed](#) "maximum pressure" campaign, downplaying [the consequences](#) of war with Iran, and actively [encouraging](#) him to attack.

HOW WE CAN PUSH BACK

We're asking that mainstream news outlets like CNN, NBC, NPR, and the Associated Press cover Trump's Iran policy with a more critical eye and feature more pro-diplomacy voices in their stories. You can sign that petition [here](#) and watch our accompanying promotional video [here](#).

OTHER IRAN NEWS THIS WEEK

- "These people want to push us into a war [with Iran], and it's so disgusting," Trump [reportedly told](#) a confidant about his top foreign policy aides. "We don't need any more wars."
- "A new [poll](#) across five 2020 swing states, and a Congressional district with a large military community, shows strong opposition to a war with Iran." Meanwhile, a [new poll](#) found that most voters supported Trump's decision to call off a strike on Iran targets after Iran downed a U.S. drone.
- While we're still waiting for the Trump administration to present solid evidence that Iran was responsible for the recent oil tanker attacks, the UAE, a major Iranian adversary in the region, [said](#) it has no evidence as to who is to blame.
- In a recent [letter](#), more than 100 Iranian human rights defenders and activists warned of the "devastating" consequences of a U.S.-Iran military conflict.
- A trio of experts [wrote](#) in the Boston Globe this week about how "[a] war with Iran to promote regime change or anything else would be long, costly, and catastrophic for the United States and the global economy."
- Here's [a look inside](#) the lobby for war with Iran.

BURIED LEDES

YIKES: A recent [poll](#) found that one-third of Americans — so about 110,000,000 of our fellow citizens — **said they'd be fine with nuking North Korea**, even with the knowledge that doing so would kill at least a million civilians.

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GOOD NEWS! The UK [announced](#) this week that it would **ban all new arms sales to the Saudi-led coalition** fighting Houthi rebels in Yemen. The UK now joins [a growing cadre of countries](#) to ban weapons sales to the coalition.

Authors of a recent study on the U.S. military and climate change wrote in an [op-ed this week](#) that **“action on climate change demands shuttering vast sections of the [U.S.] military machine.”**

“The [political momentum](#) that drives this annual increase [in defense spending], disconnected from hard thought about America’s responsibilities in a transformed world, **threatens to become — or may have already become — unstoppable.**”

A new [survey](#) from the Yemen Peace Project’s “Empower Yemen” Initiative found that “[m]ost regions of Yemen are experiencing significant suffering, and **civil society figures see an end to the war as crucial to resolving the humanitarian crisis.**”

And finally, Trump’s sanctions on Iran are [so all encompassing](#) it seems **they’re even looking to penalize dead people.**