

WIN WITHOUT WAR



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SL: The media helped bring about the war in Iraq. We can't repeat the same mistakes.

Setting the Record Straight on Iran

It's happening again.

In the lead up to the disastrous 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, the U.S. mainstream media uncritically repeated the Bush administration's lies, carelessly promoted saber-rattling narratives, and, at times, trumpeted full-blown calls for war. The media is far from a monolith, and many within it fought the invasion tooth and nail. But as a whole, the mainstream media bears a significant burden of responsibility for the war in Iraq and its lasting effects.

It seems we haven't learned our lesson. In the last few weeks, the president took us to the brink of yet another catastrophic, senseless, futile war of choice. While we were heartened to see relatively muted cheerleading for war compared to 2003, many of the same mistakes we saw then reared their ugly heads once more. It's time to set the record straight.

HOW (NOT) TO SELL A WAR

- **DON'T echo the administration's lies** — War hawks in the White House and their supporters have fed the public a steady stream of disinformation to justify their march to war for years. Recently, Trump claimed that the assassination of Qasem Soleimani disrupted an “[imminent attack](#)” and saved lives (a justification now [thoroughly debunked](#)), while Pence's asserted baselessly that Soleimani was [linked to](#) the September 11th attacks. Some in the media, unfortunately, [parrot falsehoods](#) like these without context or critique, particularly in headlines meant to catch attention. While claims made by top politicians will naturally be reported, they should be treated as just that: *claims* — claims that need to be [contextualized](#), critically interrogated, and, if they are found to lack basis, vociferously countered.
- **DON'T feed the anti-Iran hysteria** — There is no doubt that the Iranian regime is repressive, or that Qasem Soleimani committed terrible acts. But foregrounding every discussion of the costs of war or the (il)legitimacy of the Soleimani's assassination with diatribes on the unique evil of Iran only fuels the warmongering, whitewashes the United States' historical and current complicity in escalating tensions, and erases the diversity of voices within Iran, including labor, feminist, political prisoner activists, and more, seeking positive change.
- **DON'T forget who will bear the costs of war** — People in the United States have much to lose from a catastrophic war with Iran. But to frame a potential war

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only in terms of “U.S. interests,” and U.S. “security,” is to hide the true costs, while advancing an orientalist approach to foreign policymaking. It is Iranian civilians, and civilians across the region, who stand to suffer the most — and who already do under the United States’ unnecessary and deadly [sanctions](#) regime. The threat of war along is already taking its toll, as [exemplified](#) by Iran’s tragic, accidental downing of the Ukrainian airliner in the fog of war.

- **DON’T ignore attacks on the Iranian American community** — Iranian Americans were already [facing](#) repression, [infringements on civil liberties](#), [inhumane immigration policies](#), and outright [bigotry](#). But in response to Trump’s actions, the repression has already grown stronger. These are also costs of war. The voices of Iranians and Iranian Americans should be sought out and lifted up, not overlooked or silenced.
- **DON’T coopt the Iranian protest movement** — Iran is, and historically has been, home to a vibrant, courageous movement for democracy, liberation, and justice. This manifested most recently in November’s mass street protests that were violently repressed in Tehran, Yazd, Esfahan, Shiraz, and Mashhad, called in response to the inflation, poverty, and inequality caused by decades of government mismanagement, human rights abuses, and corruption — all exacerbated by U.S. sanctions. But simply because this movement opposes the Iranian regime does *not* mean it welcomes a U.S. military intervention, nor that Trump’s actions are in any way intended to support them — despite Trump’s [tweets](#), Mike Pompeo’s [claims](#), State Department [videos](#), or the cherry-picking of reporters with [questionable incentives](#). In fact, the greater the threat of U.S. violence, the more moderates rally around the regime, the harder the regime cracks down on dissenters, and the less likely it is that activists in Iran can achieve their aims. It is possible to [oppose both](#) the “repressive government” of Iran and the “imperialist power” of the United States, and [lift up activists](#) across Iran and Iraq without tokenizing or generalizing the “Iranian People,” or undermining grassroots movements.
- **DON’T lose sight of how we got here** — In 1953, the United States [backed](#) a coup against the democratically elected Prime Minister Mosaddegh and [reinstated](#) the brutal, authoritarian Shah, in the name of oil. When the current regime came to power, it was in a wave of discontent against the Shah, led by diverse movements in popular uprising. When protestors took Americans hostage in 1979, it was in response to the United States admitting the exiled Shah into its borders. Cut to the Trump administration unilaterally violating the successful 2015 Iran nuclear deal, launching a “maximum pressure” campaign that includes deadly sanctions, unconditionally supporting Iran’s rivals — Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Israel — regardless of consequences, and, finally, assassinating one of Iran’s most powerful military leaders. Everything cannot and should not be blamed on the United States. But neither should the history of and current U.S. actions that have helped us get to this point be ignored.

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- **DON'T invite those who vocally supported the invasion of Iraq to speak as experts on whether or not to go to war with Iran** — [Just don't](#).

WE MUST NOT REPEAT 2003

All-out war with Iran is hopefully no longer imminent. But we're not out of the woods yet. Tensions between the two nations remain high. Newly-announced sanctions spell further suffering for the Iranian people and a rallying cry for the hardliners. And the root causes — warmongers in power, Islamophobia, anti-Iranian bigotry, a sprawling military-industrial complex, decades of distrust rooted in the 1953 U.S.-backed coup, a refusal to engage in actual diplomacy, and more — remain untouched.

We are still at risk of war with Iran. The media must be vigilant about the ways that they may amplify that risk. We must not repeat the mistakes of 2003.

THE STATE OF PLAY

Thankfully, progressive leaders — backed by [grassroots movements](#) across the country — are advancing critical legislation to block the path to war:

- **Rep. Elissa Slotkin's war powers resolution, [H.Con.Res.83](#)**, to direct the president to withdraw U.S. troops from hostilities against Iran, has passed the House.
- **The Senate will soon vote on Sen. Kaine's war powers resolution, [S.J.Res.68](#)**, which appears to have the support it needs to pass. Rep. Slotkin has already said the House will vote to pass Senator Kaine's resolution, likely drawing a veto from Donald Trump.
- **Rep. Ro Khanna's bill, [H.R.5543](#), to [bar funding for an unauthorized war with Iran](#), [will be considered by the House](#)** during the week of January 27th.
- **Rep. Barbara Lee's bill, [H.R. 2456](#), to repeal the 2002 Authorization for Use of Military Force against Iraq (AUMF)** – which the administration has attempted to use as legal justification for the Soleimani assassination – will be considered the same week.
- **Sen. Markey and Reps. Engel and Ryan have introduced [resolutions, \[S.Con.Res. 32/H.Res. 795\]\(#\)](#), to protect Iran's historic and cultural sites**, and uphold the United States' responsibility not to commit war crimes.

Take action with us to support Congress' efforts to rein in Trump by [writing your Senators here](#) and [calling your Senators here](#).

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BURIED LEDES

The Trump administration's racist immigration policies continue: a growing number of **Iranian students with valid visas are being [deported](#)** from U.S. airports.

In further cruel deportation news, **Mexican immigrants seeking asylum in the United States may now be [sent](#) to Central America.**

The ocean is [warming](#) at a rate of 5 atom bombs per second. We're not quite used to those units, but we're pretty sure that's fast. Your weekly reminder that the climate crisis is real.

The Trump administration [placed](#) severe restrictions on its already-delayed disaster aid to Puerto Rico, suspending the minimum wage and blocking funds from use on the island's electrical grid. Meanwhile, a few [disaster profiteers](#) have made off like bandits.

Human Rights Watch released their [2020 World Report](#), highlighting the egregious, ongoing human rights abuses and humanitarian catastrophe in [Yemen](#).

Human rights activism is essential, but [also very dangerous work](#). **Over 300 human rights activists were killed in 2019,** with two-thirds of the killings taking place in Latin America.

Trump openly admitted to prioritizing profit over the lives of soldiers and civilians in Syria, stating that he left troops in the area "[because I kept the oil](#)". At least he's being honest,

Armed conflict – of which the U.S. is a part – is still very much present in Somalia, leaving many Somalis in danger. That's why **50 House Democrats, led by Rep. Ilhan Omar, sent a letter to Mike Pompeo calling for [the extension and redesignation of Temporary Protected Status \(TPS\) for Somalis](#).** □

Has the prospect of conventional war with Iran not concerned you enough? In that case, **consider what would happen [if the war goes nuclear](#).**

And finally, **Spotify is now [making](#) algorithmically-curated playlists for pets.** Thank goodness for the market's efficient allocation of resources.