

WIN WITHOUT WAR



Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

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SL: Sanctions for Iran, Weapons for Israel

The Takeaway:

- Though near-opposite contexts, stories from Israel and Iran paint a single picture: all across the globe, U.S. militarism fuels violence, empowers repressive governments, and obstructs the path to justice.
- Israel has long been seen as an unquestionable U.S. “ally.” Unwavering U.S. diplomatic and military support is fueling a violent crackdown on Palestinians resisting apartheid and forced expulsion.
- Iran, meanwhile, is the subject of vicious U.S. aggression. As our latest [webinar](#) explores, this antagonism — and broad-based sanctions in particular — are immiserating, deadly, and a powerful obstacle to those fighting for progress and human rights in the country.

In Israel and Iran, a Microcosm of What’s Wrong with U.S. Foreign Policy

The U.S. relationship with the Israeli and Iranian governments could not be more different. The first has the United States’ unyielding devotion — a special “alliance” that is taboo to even question. The second is the boogeyman of U.S. foreign policy, so demonized President Bush labeled it — with a straight face — part of an “Axis of Evil.” But while one receives U.S. support and the other U.S. aggression, the outcome of the U.S. approach is the same: violence, repression, and human rights abuses. In two stories this week — one in our work, one in the world — we find a microcosm of all that is wrong with U.S. foreign policy.

Sanctions Undermine Changemakers in Iran

To all too many U.S. policymakers, Iran is an enemy. Full stop. Not certain segments of Iran’s government, not Iran’s ruling class, but Iran — a country, a people, an idea. And as an enemy, no amount of aggression, no amount of punishment, no amount of suffering is too much. That is why, for decades, U.S. policy toward Iran has been defined by unceasing antagonism, from hostile rhetoric to assassinations to proxy wars. But of all of the tools in the U.S. arsenal, few are as destructive as the wanton use of broad-based sanctions. This Wednesday, Win Without War Education Fund [brought together](#) over 100 grassroots activists, as well as leading foreign policy and human rights experts, to discuss the devastating impact of these weapons of collective punishment.

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“Sanctions have done tremendous harm to the lives of ordinary people in Iran, driving millions into poverty,” **said Mani Mostofi, Director of Miaan Group.** “Imagine, all of you, if your income dropped 70%... When we talk about sanctions on Iran, one way to frame it is as sanctions on the economy, but another way to frame it is as sanctions on 80 million people.”

Broad-based sanctions also undermine the struggles of those in Iran fighting for change. “There are thousands of organizations who have been working for years to hold the government accountable, and the sanctions have impacted everything — from their advocacy and education to service delivery,” **said Sussan Tahmasebi, Director of FEMENA.** “Activists have to contend with economic pressures resulting from sanctions *as well as* state repression when trying to bring about positive change.”

Tyler Cullis, Counsel at Ferrari & Associates and sanctions law expert, imagined the alternative: “Imagine a broad reopening that allows for Iranian civil society and US civil society to interact, unhindered... The time is ripe for the Biden administration to center these humanitarian impacts when considering U.S. sanctions policy and to fully appreciate that U.S. interests are not served by sanctions that harm humanitarian trade and undermine civil society.

In short, while U.S. policymakers invoke human rights concerns to justify their aggression, their actual policies are only adding to the burden of actual human rights activists, all while rallying support for hardliners in government. The United States labels an entire country an “enemy,” it attacks that enemy with all of its might, and in the end, it is the people of that country who suffer. Watch the webinar in full [here](#).

U.S. Weapons Fuel Violence Against Palestinians

In Israel and Palestine, the problem is exactly the opposite. Israel is, to U.S. policymakers, a partner and an “ally.” And as such, no amount of human rights abuses, no degree of egregious violence, no level of repression of a people simply struggling for dignity and freedom, should cause the United States to waver in its support. And so, U.S. policymakers [block](#) any criticism of Israel in international fora, attempt to [criminalize](#) support for even peaceful forms of resistance, and, critically, give \$3.8 billion per year in military assistance [without condition](#). As the Adalah Justice Project [says](#): “Palestine is not simply a foreign policy issue. Palestine is here. Our US tax dollars are funding this.”

The U.S. Campaign for Palestinian Rights [drives home](#) the effects of U.S. support for its “ally”: “The U.S. provides Israel with unconditional diplomatic support and military funding, and Israel uses U.S. backing to act with impunity: stealing Palestinian land, entrenching its apartheid regime, and prolonging its blockade on Gaza. Our tax dollars are funding Israel's crimes against humanity.”

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This week, we have seen the tragic result of this unconditional support, from the planned expulsion of Palestinian communities from their homes in Sheikh Jarrah, to the raid on the holy site of al Aqsa during Ramadan, to the horrific bombing of the densely populated open-air prison of Gaza. We joined with 140 progressive groups to [condemn](#) the Israeli government's war crimes. The mechanism may be different than in Iran, but once again, U.S. policy fuels repression, violence, and injustice. In the [words](#) of Palestinian activists Noura Erakat and Mariam Barghouti: "When will the world open its eyes to this injustice and respond appropriately?"

A New Approach

If, in its approach to both its "allies" and its "enemies," U.S. foreign policy yields the same result, what is to be done? We can think of three things that are consistently missing.

1. To begin with: nuance. Rather than dividing the world into "good" and "evil," and treating entire countries as monoliths, a progressive U.S. foreign policy would recognize that countries are composed of millions of people, with often competing needs and interests. Yes, the Iranian government is repressive and the often brutal violence it commits at home and abroad must be condemned — and sanctioning an entire population in the hopes that it will convince them to overthrow their government on your behalf is both an injustice and an absurdity.
2. Second, diplomacy. Rather than relying on blunt tools of military and economic aggression — like unconditional military aid and blanket sanctions — a progressive U.S. foreign policy would prioritize multilateralism, diplomacy, and cooperation to support human rights and build peace.
3. Third, and perhaps most importantly: values. Rather than invoking values such as human rights when convenient and ignoring them otherwise, a progressive U.S. foreign policy would consistently uphold our values of rights, equity, and justice *in every instance*.

Whether in Iran, in Israel, in Palestine, or beyond, these principles — [and more](#) — are foundational to the progressive foreign policy we're fighting. And we can help make them a reality. Take action to end suffocating sanctions and support diplomacy with Iran [here](#), or join in solidarity with Palestinians in their struggle against apartheid and colonialism [here](#).

BURIED LEDES

U.S. forces that withdraw from Afghanistan may just be replaced by more [private contractors](#). Dear President Biden: ending the U.S. war in Afghanistan does *not* mean privatizing the war...

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We've said it before, and we'll say it again: **Broad. Sanctions. Are. Inhumane.** In North Korea, where everyday civilians already repressed by the government, sanctions that affect the whole population are especially cruel — **and, as our colleague Dan Jasper writes, [don't bring us closer to peace.](#)**

U.S. lobbying firms are [raking in cash](#) playing publicist for autocratic governments. For example, PR firm Edelman has made millions painting Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman as a good guy. Hot take: we should let dictators keep their bad rap.

Get your fake *surprised* face ready. **The Pentagon has [been surveilling U.S.-Americans without a warrant, by using our app and online data.](#)** It's not only a dangerous violation of privacy, it's creepy. DoD does not need to know about our late night impulse shopping.

From the highest peak of Mount Everest...to the hospital ward. **[Oxygen tanks typically used by climbers in the Himalayas are being airlifted to Covid patients in the I.C.U.,](#)** due to an oxygen shortage from a surge of the virus in Nepal.

The Covid recovery is a once in a lifetime opportunity to fix a broken global system of trade and finance. A new [report](#) by Boston University and UNCTAD explores the flaws in our system, and how to build a world for both people and planet.

Attorney Steven Donziger won a landmark case against Chevron for their mass poisoning of the Amazon and the people who live there. **Now, he's [facing his own trial as Chevron vengefully attacks him with dubious countercharges.](#)** Turns out money buys power — who knew?

What if we told you...that money buys power? In the last two election cycles, the **top U.S. defense companies [spent 760 times more](#) money on lobbying and political contributions than the largest peace and justice organizations.**

The right-wing Duque government's U.S.-funded police [continued](#) their brutal repression of those protesting his plans to appease international creditors by imposing austerity on the working class. Or, as the *New York Times* puts it: Duque tried to “close a fiscal hole” and the overreacting police may “need reform.”

And finally, a promising new NBA star? **Long live [“Long Boi”!](#)**