

Fentanyl Crisis Must Not be Used as a Racist Cudgel

The Headline

The House GOP wants to broaden and deepen the failed war on drugs, with frightening domestic and international consequences. Their latest gambit: a [bill](#) to try to force the administration to renegotiate the international Chemical Weapons Convention so that fentanyl can be labeled a “chemical weapon.” Currently flying under the public radar, this “Project Precursor Act” comes months after a fall 2022 [push](#) by 18 Attorneys General to classify the drug as a “weapon of mass destruction.”

Labeling fentanyl – a drug that, despite damaging misuse that has led to 200 people dying everyday in the United States, has real therapeutic benefits – a “chemical weapon” is a rhetorical move intended to lay the groundwork for disastrous military overreach. Republicans in Congress and GOP presidential aspirants are already pushing for military strikes in Mexico, targeting the country’s cartels – they would love nothing more than fentanyl’s “chemical weapon” designation to serve as the *casus belli* of a deadly and avoidable cross-border conflict. Meanwhile, medical professionals would back away from fentanyl’s licit and closely managed applications, people who illicitly use fentanyl would face the stigma of buying and consuming a “weapon”, and vulnerable migrants at the border, already wrongfully scapegoated for the fentanyl crisis, would be subject to further abuse as phantom “chemical weapons dealers.” The mean-spirited bill would do nothing to treat victims of fentanyl or decrease demand – but it is in line with the racist, failed war on drugs and the [aimless militarization](#) of the border.

Since it quietly passed out of the House Foreign Affairs Committee by voice vote, the bill could find its way to the floor for a final vote – and a kick to the Senate – in the weeks ahead. As it comes up for a vote, members of Congress will need to loudly oppose normalizing this irresponsible and slippery right wing rhetoric. Fentanyl is doing damage to communities across the United States – this damage doesn’t need to be compounded by a deepening war on drugs or, as some would like, a new and unpredictable escalation along the U.S.-Mexico border.

What’s next: As we wait for a vote, we must pressure members of Congress to speak out and condemn this bill’s “chemical weapons” rhetoric for the slippery slope it is.

The Happenings

June 7th, 12pm-1pm ET: “How Death Outlives War: The Reverberating Impacts of the Post-9/11 Wars on Human Health,” [Brown University](#)

June 11th-13th: “FP4A Leadership Summit,” [Foreign Policy for America](#)

The Spotlight

In today's spotlight, we interview [Sina Toossi](#), Senior Non-Resident Fellow at the Center for International Policy. You can follow him on Twitter [here](#).

1): What was the first moment you realized you were interested in working on U.S. policy towards Iran and the region? What is one thing you wish was better or more widely understood about U.S.-Iran relations?

The events of 9/11 and the Iraq War sparked my interest in U.S. policy towards Iran and the region when I was a teenager. I witnessed the injustice and violence of the so-called "war on terror" and felt a connection to Iran, my country of heritage. I did not want Iran to become another target of unjust war. This made me politically conscious and curious about history and geopolitics, and I started to learn more about U.S.-Iran relations and their decades-long animosity.

One thing I wish was better understood about their relations is that both sides have a long history of mutual grievances that have shaped their current posture, but also many potential areas for cooperation and dialogue. Historical wounds like the 1953 U.S./UK-led coup and the 1979 hostage crisis have shaped their current relations, but there is a potential for change. The U.S. and Iran have more shared interests and cultural commonalities than many realize, offering a basis for improved understanding and cooperation.

2): Last week, CNN [quoted](#) you in its discussion about the replacement of Iran's national security chief, Ali Shamkhani. Shamkhani appears to have led the Iran-Saudi detente past the finish line in Beijing, earlier this year. Both in its domestic political scene and in its regional policy, Iran seems to now be undergoing major shifts. What has led Iran to this point, and what could it mean for President Biden's policy towards Iran in the coming year?

Iran's domestic politics have undergone major shifts in recent years. The moderate camp, led by former President Hassan Rouhani, negotiated the nuclear deal in 2015 with the Obama administration and staked its political capital on improving relations with the West. However, this camp was greatly undermined by the Trump administration's reneging on the nuclear deal and reimposing severe sanctions under a "maximum pressure" policy. As a result, Iran's hardliners have sidelined moderates and reformists, and have taken control of all levers of the state.

This is the broader context of Shamkhani's removal. He was appointed by Rouhani and held the influential security post for nearly 10 years, during which he was involved in the nuclear negotiations. He was also instrumental in leading the Iran-Saudi detente in Beijing earlier this year. But he has now been replaced by a Revolutionary Guards commander who has been closer to hardliners, opposed détente with the U.S., and specializes in asymmetric warfare and defense, not politics and diplomacy like Shamkhani.

Iran's developments challenge Biden's diplomatic efforts with Iran on the nuclear deal and other issues. He must overcome Iran's hardliners' mistrust and hostility, as well as his domestic foes'

opposition and pressure. He needs courage and leadership to pursue a peaceful and progressive policy that benefits both countries and the region.

Buried Ledes

This week, a United Nations operation began to salvage the FSO Safer, an old supertanker carrying more than 1 billion barrels of oil a few miles off the coast of Yemen. Delayed for years, this plan [will avert a devastating oil spill in the Red Sea](#), since the tanker holds about four times the amount of oil leaked in the horrendous 1989 Exxon Valdez disaster. If inspections go as planned, the oil will be transferred to a UN tanker. Originally serving as a storage facility carrying oil from eastern Yemen through a pipeline, the FSO Safer has sat off Yemen's coast for more than 30 years — but [offloading and maintenance stopped in 2015 after the start of the Yemen war](#). An environmental and humanitarian threat, the tanker has been called a [“ticking time bomb.”](#)

Before evacuating Sudan, diplomats at the U.S. Embassy in Khartoum [“destroyed” an unspecified number of Sudanese people's passports](#) before evacuating the country in April, blocking many Sudanese nationals from fleeing the violence. Some of these passports were left at the embassy for visa processing. Some other governments evacuating diplomats in April also left Sudanese passports locked inside emptied embassies. One Sudanese national said the U.S. government “tied our hands and put us in hell,” and “I feel we are not treated as human beings.” Another Sudanese person living in the United States told the *Washington Post* that he was lobbying on behalf of ten individuals and families whose passports were also destroyed.

[More than 130](#) members of Congress and the European Parliament are urging for the UAE's oil executive Sultan al Jaber [to be removed as the designated head of the upcoming COP28 climate talks](#). In a letter sent to President Biden, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, and the United Nations to voice “profound concern,” the lawmakers argued that al Jaber's appointment would “exert undue influence” on the climate negotiations. In response, the UK's Minister for Net Zero Graham Stuart defended al Jaber's appointment and said he was [“an outstanding individual.”](#) U.S. climate envoy John Kerry has also previously called al Jaber a [“terrific choice.”](#) The state oil company al-Jaber runs, Adnoc, [pumped](#) 2.7 million barrels of oil per day in 2021, and aims to hit 5 million barrels per day by 2027.

A team of two Saudi and two American astronauts, including the first Arab woman sent into Earth's orbit, [have safely returned to Earth](#), parachuting into the Gulf of Mexico. This marks the second concluded mission organized, equipped, and trained by the private company Axiom Space. This is [“just the start” for Saudi Arabia's “ambitious plans”](#) for space. Special adviser to the Saudi Space Commission, Mishaal Ashemimry, says, “space is collaborative, and we intend to participate in that collaboration.” This comes as the UAE's space agency announces that [it is planning a tour of the asteroid belt](#) between Mars and Jupiter, after its successful mission circling and studying Mars.

A New York federal appeals court has [granted immunity to the members of the Sackler family from future lawsuits](#) in exchange for \$5 to \$6 billion and relinquishing control of Purdue Pharma, an opioid manufacturer. About \$750 million from that settlement will go to individuals across the United States who have become addicted to OxyContin, and to the families of people who died from overdoses. California's Attorney General Rob Bonta [shared that](#) "disappointingly, the decision does not require Purdue to lift the Sacklers' liability shield from private claims. The victims of this crisis deserve justice and they should have the option to take Purdue to court for it."

Four years ago, a whale spotted off Norway's northern coast [wearing an apparent Russian-made harness sparked accusations](#) that he came from a Russian military facility. The whale — nicknamed Hvaldimir by whale-watchers — is now off of Sweden's southern coast. One marine biologist claims, "He is a little lonely whale who hopes to find other white whales that he can hang out with." Since there are few beluga whales along the Norwegian coast and in Sweden, "He probably wants to have a family but has swum a little wrong."