

Anti-Iran Sanctions are Immoral, Illegal and Cowardly

Interview with public policy scholar Soraya Sepahpour-Ulrich

By [Soraya Sepahpour-Ulrich](#) and [Kourosh Ziabari](#)

Global Research, March 13, 2013

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

In-depth Report: [IRAN: THE NEXT WAR?](#)

Sanctions imposed on Iran by the United States and its allies are “immoral and illegal – and cowardly”, public policy scholar and researcher Soraya Sepahpour-Ulrich says.

Sepahpour-Ulrich, who has a Master’s in Public Diplomacy from USC Annenberg for Communication, made the remarks during an exclusive interview with the Tehran Times this week. “I believe that there should be no mistake about the reality that sanctions are warfare without the military involvement,” she added.

Sepahpour-Ulrich is an independent researcher and writer with a focus on U.S. foreign policy. Her articles have been published by several online publications.

Following is the text of Sepahpour-Ulrich’s interview with the Tehran Times:

Q: What do you think about the sanctions imposed on Iran by the United States and its allies? The U.S. claims that it intends to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. In the light of this claim, it seems that banning foodstuff, medicine, airplane spare parts and other consumer goods has no moral ground and is utterly unjustifiable. What’s your viewpoint on that?

A: No matter how you look at the sanctions, they are immoral and illegal – and cowardly. It would be naive to believe that their goal of these sanctions is to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. I believe that there should be no mistake about the reality that sanctions are warfare without the military involvement. They have a multitude of goals. One is to convince the war weary and war wary public that there is diplomacy in place to avoid a ‘military option’. Collective punishment is illegal under international law. Also, the notion that economic sanctions are morally preferable to the use of military force has been challenged by Albert C. Pierce, Ethics and National Security professor at the National Defense University. His analysis showed that economic sanctions inflict great pain, suffering, and physical harm on the innocent civilians; so much so that small-scale military operations were sometimes preferable. But America and allies cannot afford a military assault, regardless of the size and scale for obvious reasons.

As such, one can only conclude that the aim of these sanctions is for the resultant hardship to promote internal discord which would undermine the security of the country, and to internalize the enemy.

I also believe that by “keeping all options on the table”, that is, gunboat diplomacy, is

designed to push the Iranian government to invest more in defense at a cost to the people in the country, in other words, push the country to choose “guns over butter” in order to create of exasperate social unrest.

Q: Aren't the sanctions imposed on Iran equivalent to violation of human rights by the United States? U.S. officials frequently brag about their commitment to human rights, freedom and democracy, but they're denying Iranians their most basic rights. Do you agree with this premise?

A: Absolutely! (although there is no universal human rights – a discussion for another day!), and as stated earlier, they violate international law. Under the 1949 Geneva Conventions, collective punishment is a war crime. Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention states: “No protected person may be punished for an offense he or she has not personally committed,” and “collective penalties and likewise all measures of intimidation or of terrorism are prohibited.”

As for American protection and promotion of ‘human rights’, it should be understood that America defines the profile of the “victim” in line with its foreign policy agenda.

What we see happening around the world, including the sanctions we mentioned, is a sharp and stark reminder of the usual hypocrisy and double standards in Washington especially in light of the 2010 national security strategy released by Obama in which he claimed that “the freedom that America stands for includes freedom from want. Basic human rights cannot thrive in places where human beings do not have access to enough food, or clean water, or the medicine they need to survive”.

The American-led sanctions are intended to deprive Iranians of these basic human rights they claim to support; the “Freedom from want” Obama boasted of.

Q: The U.S. and EU recently ordered their media regulators and satellite providers to take Iran's international TV channels such as Press TV and Al-Alam off the air. Does this decision run counter to the principles of free speech and democracy? How is it possible to justify the silencing of a number of independent media outlets without presenting reliable and convincing reasons?

A: Regrettably, as with all their other wars, the U.S. and EU allies have never been forced to give reliable and convincing reason and evidence.

That said, it is important to recognize that there is only selective ‘free speech’ in the U.S. and the EU. We must also bear in mind that there is a monopoly on the media to facilitate the implementation of policies. The role and purpose of this monopoly is to disseminate acceptable ideological messages, controlling news and information which is achieved with censorship and propaganda. A major threat to the people in this country has been the illusion of ‘free speech’. They have lost the ability to question, more tragically, they are not aware of being indoctrinated. If Press TV or any other media outlet interferes with their propagandistic messages, or even hint at a room for pause, then they are deemed a threat. The Information Operations Roadmap laid out in 2003 by the then Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld (carried on by Leon Panetta), made it very clear that the goal of the Pentagon/U.S. is to “provide maximum control of the entire electromagnetic spectrum”.

Q: The United States and Israel have repeatedly threatened Iran with a military

strike and warned that they will bomb Iran's nuclear sites if it doesn't abandon its nuclear program. Aren't these war threats incompatible with the principles of the UN Charter? Why hasn't the Security Council ever reacted to this war rhetoric used by the U.S. and Israel?

A: This is a very good question and I am not sure if I have the answer. What is clear is that while Britain and France follow the U.S. lead as a matter of course, they also have their own share of pro-Israel influences which have formidable political clout. It is incomprehensible why China and Russia should remain silent, other than a mild protest from time to time. Of course, one must also take into account the sad reality that the more Iran is threatened and isolated by U.S. and allies, the more it will be drawn into the China and Russia sphere of influence. It would be hard to give up such potential sway over a country such as Iran.

The UNSC is a powerful body, which protects the will and power its members enjoy and has the ability to legalize crime, if you will. A couple of more recent examples such as the UNSC idly standing by as Iraq used chemical weapons against Iran for 3 years in violation of the Geneva Conventions; or not putting a stop to the infanticide of 500,000 Iraqi children speaks volumes about the UNSC's role.

Q: In one of your articles, you mentioned that the United States has continuously violated the terms of the 1981 Algiers Accords including nonintervention in Iran's internal affairs, in political and military levels, removing the freeze on Iran's assets and trade sanctions, etc. Is Iran legally entitled to file a lawsuit against the United States over the violation of the terms of this treaty?

A: The bilateral Algiers Accords is binding and subject to International Laws. Per Article VI of the Algiers Accords, the violated party [Iran] has the right to refer the matter to the Tribunal at Hague, the Netherlands, where the International Court of Justice will have jurisdiction. How effective would this action/referral be? One has to consider that the International Court of Justice (ICJ) is the principal judicial organ of the United Nations. The United States contributes approximately 25% of the UN budget which translates into its control.

Q: You've written a detailed article about the anti-Iran movie Argo that depicts the story of 1979 hostage crisis from a prejudiced and biased perspective. The movie won three Academy Awards and received international acclaim this year in the wake of growing pressures by the United States and its partners on Iran. Was the movie's success a result of its artistic merit and value or simply due to behind-the-scenes political games?

A: Many movie-goers would argue that "Argo" lacked the artistic credentials that merited awards. I have no doubt that the award was politically motivated to a politically themed and inaccurate movie. Hollywood is the propaganda arm of the political elite - the neoconservatives. I would like to emphasize the definition of neocons according to the self-confessed former neoconservative Jacob Heilbrunn. Neo-conservatism "is in a decisive respect a Jewish phenomenon," even if many adherents - albeit a minority - are not Jewish and even though most U.S. Jews are not neoconservatives. Neoconservatives, he adds, both Jew and gentile, are bound by a "shared commitment to the largest, most important Jewish cause: the survival of Israel."

Hollywood has always been engaged in this agenda and has acted to unite and cement — at the time — the 20th Century Christian in support of Israel by promoting Jerusalem as the

city where “Jesus walked” — a notion enforced with such Hollywood movies as “Ten Commandments” which portrayed the “rule of God” — with often thought handsome and masculine Charlton Heston as Moses. This film was shown and applauded in the Knesset (“Moses and Ben-Gurion,” Time, May 30, 1960). Other movies such as Samson and Delilah promoted the Jewish male as strong and masculine; values the American male could relate to.

Today, it is the same principle, but different agendas. It is imperative for the neocons plans to portray Iranians in a very negative light. Israel’s actions have caused it to lose support among many Americans and Europeans who no longer see Israel as a victim to be protected, but an aggressor. This mindset had to be altered by projecting a bigger ‘threat’ to the world (Argo) and presenting Iranians as a threat versus Israel-America.

Q: What’s your viewpoint regarding the covert plans and endeavors by the U.S. government to endanger and undermine Iran’s security through assassinating scientists, dispatching surveillance drones to Iran’s airspace, funding terrorist groups such as MKO to carry out acts of sabotage in different cities of Iran and also its propaganda campaign against Iran?

A: Clearly, the intention is to create insecurity and undermine the Iranian government. I have no doubt that America would like to see the government in Tehran replaced with a subservient “ally”. It has been actively engaged in this endeavor since the onset of the Iranian Revolution. Clearly, it has failed. It is possible that the United States hopes to provoke a reaction from Iran. As stated earlier, the U.S. cannot afford to start a military assault as Iran’s retaliation, even if it means closing the Strait of Hormuz for a few days or week, would take such a financial toll around the globe that at the time of virtually global austerity and economic crisis, should America or Israel start such a conflict, it would find itself isolated. However, should Iran react to these terrorist measures, American can justify a more aggressive action — even though such action from Iran, if taken, would be justifiable and defensive. Iran has avoided this trap, which is why America has resorted to lies.

Special thanks to my Spanish friend and colleague Moises Herrezuelo for arranging this interview.

This interview has been originally published by [Tehran Times](#).

The original source of this article is Global Research
Copyright © [Soraya Sepahpour-Ulrich](#) and [Kourosh Ziabari](#), Global Research, 2013

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Soraya Sepahpour-Ulrich](#) and [Kourosh Ziabari](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca