

Sanctions: Weapons of Mass Death and Destruction

By [Larry Everest](#)

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Iran hasn't been in the headlines in recent months, but there's a lot of talk that 2013 will be the year of decision on Iran—whether a deal will be struck between the U.S. and its allies and Iran on ending or restricting Iran's nuclear enrichment program, or whether the U.S., Israel and other big powers will attack Iran.

The debate about confirming former Sen. Chuck Hagel, President Obama's nominee for Secretary of Defense, revolves around whether he's "tough enough" on Iran, while leading think-tank strategists are calling for overt preparations for attacking Iran, tougher economic sanctions and "more explicit threats to destroy its nuclear programme by military means." ([Jim Lobe](#), January 16)

"In 2013, perhaps in the next few months, President Obama will face a crisis on Iran. He has categorically ruled out living with a nuclear-armed Iran under a Cold War—style policy of containment," Fareed Zakaria writes. "That means either Iran will capitulate to U.S. demands or the U.S. will go to war with Iran. Since the first option is extremely unlikely and the second extremely unattractive, the Obama administration needs to find a negotiated solution. That means using sticks and carrots—or what is often called coercive diplomacy—to get a deal that Washington and Tehran can live with....Otherwise, 2013 will be the year that we accepted a nuclear Iran or went to war." ("[The Year We Reckon With Iran](#)," January 21, Time)

In short, tough sanctions are being promoted as a kinder, gentler alternative to war. And perhaps some people voted for Obama in part because they perceived him as less likely to start a war with Iran than Romney.

But let's get clear: Stiffening sanctions is a form of war against an entire population—a real weapon of mass destruction that is already imposing enormous suffering and death on the Iranian population. The U.S. is literally murdering babies and other vulnerable sections of the populations, but this fact is rarely mentioned by the cheerleaders of empire—aka the U.S. media—and there is no debate about it within the U.S. ruling class.

"Targeted" Sanctions Target the Iranian People

The U.S. claims that its sanctions are "smart" or "targeted" and only aimed at Iran's government—the Islamic Republic—and its top leaders. But because the U.S. and its big power allies (Germany, France, Britain and other European countries) are sanctioning and embargoing Iranian banks, they have crippled Iran's ability to pay for urgently needed imports—including medicines—and halted many shipments. In addition, many drugs and needed chemicals aren't getting into Iran thanks to the banning under the sanctions of

“dual-use” chemicals with possible military applications.

Here are some of the impacts being felt, just in terms of drugs and medicines:

“Hundreds of thousands of Iranians with serious illnesses have been put at imminent risk by the unintended consequences of international sanctions, which have led to dire shortages of life-saving medicines such as chemotherapy drugs for cancer and blood-clotting agents for haemophiliacs,” [Guardian UK](#) reports.

Iran produces most of its medicines internally, but sanctions have crippled domestic production making many Iranian-made drugs unavailable or very costly. This past October, two pharmaceutical companies closed and others are facing closure or bankruptcy.

The director general of Iran’s largest biggest pharmaceutical firm told the *Guardian*, “There are patients for whom a medicine is the difference between life and death. What is the world doing about this? Are Britain, Germany, and France thinking about what they are doing? If you have cancer and you can’t find your chemotherapy drug, your death will come soon. It is as simple as that.”

His firm can no longer buy medical equipment including sterilizing machines essential for making many drugs, and some of the biggest western pharmaceutical companies refuse to have anything to do with Iran. “The west lies when it says it hasn’t imposed sanctions on our medical sector. Many medical firms have sanctioned us,” he said.

According to the *Guardian*, there’s a “looming” health crisis in Iran. Each year 85,000 new cancer patients are diagnosed who need chemotherapy and radiotherapy, now in short supply.

“Iranian health experts say that annual figure has nearly doubled in five years, referring to a ‘cancer tsunami’ most likely caused by air, water and soil pollution and possibly cheap low-quality imported food and other products....An estimated 23,000 Iranians with HIV/Aids have had their access to the drugs they need to keep them alive severely restricted. The society representing the 8,000 Iranians suffering from thalassaemia, an inherited blood disorder, has said its members are beginning to die because of a lack of an essential drug, deferoxamine, used to control the iron content in the blood.”

Iran’s over 8,000 hemophiliacs are in grave peril. It’s more and more difficult for them to get blood clotting agents, and operations on hemophiliacs “have been virtually suspended because of the risks created by the shortages,” the *Guardian* reports. At the end of October 2012, a 15-year-old child died for lack of coagulant medication. The head of Iran’s Hemophilia Society said, “This is a blatant hostage-taking of the most vulnerable people by countries which claim they care about human rights. Even a few days of delay can have serious consequences like haemorrhage and disability.” (See, Mehrnaz Shahabi, “[The unfolding humanitarian catastrophe of economic sanctions on the people of Iran.](#)”)

Last year, Iran’s Hemophilia Society told the World Federation of Hemophilia that tens of thousands of children’s lives were being threatened by shortages of medicines.

Again, this is just the sanctions’ impact on Iran’s healthcare—it is also devastating the population in a hundred other ways big and small.

They Know...And They're Killing Babies Anyway

The Obama administration and its allies know full well how sanctions are impacting the people of Iran—including helpless babies. In fact, they've admitted in rare moments of truth-telling (mainly within their own ranks in discussions of strategy and tactics) that the whole point of sanctions is to cause suffering and discontent among Iran's population, in order to pressure or collapse the Islamic Republic. An article last year in an article titled, "[Public ire one goal of Iran sanctions, U.S. official says](#), the *Washington Post* reported, "The Obama administration sees economic sanctions against Iran as building public discontent that will help compel the government to abandon an alleged nuclear weapons program, according to a senior U.S. intelligence official."

A column in the rightwing *Wall Street Journal* - "[What Iran Sanctions Can and Can't Do](#)," — was more explicit: sanctions were a "tool to precipitate the regime's collapse."

Too many people see sanctions as a thoughtful, peaceful, or diplomatic alternative to war. Bullshit.

It's nonsensical as well as criminal because sanctions are already in effect killing people, but it's also because sanctions can be part of the preparations or strategy for war. This is what the U.S. did to Iraq before the 1991 Persian Gulf War and the 2003 invasion and occupation of Iraq. Between these two wars and the intervening 13 years of sanctions, well over a million—probably over 2 million—Iraqis were killed. And did those sanctions prevent war? No. Because one goal of imperialist sanctions is to win political support for war if that's deemed necessary: "We tried sanctions and had to resort to war," they'll claim.

Another goal is to soften an enemy up so waging war will prove easier—again, if the imperialists deem it necessary.

Sanctions or War = Imperialist Aggression

Neither imperialist war, nor imperialist sanctions, nor imperialist "diplomacy" are anything other than different forms of imperialist aggression. None of them are moral, or just. All must be opposed. It's unconscionable for people in the U.S. to sit passively and silently by as these crimes are being carried out in our names, resulting in the suffering and deaths of thousands of people, thousands of miles away.

We can't accept the terms that it's either sanctions or war - either slow death or fast death. The U.S. is killing Iranian civilians in the interests of an unjust empire, and this is something that everyone with a conscience and a basic sense of right and wrong should oppose and protest.

Larry Everest is a correspondent for Revolution newspaper (revcom.us), where this article first appeared, and author of Oil, Power & Empire: Iraq and the U.S. Global Agenda (Common Courage 2004). In 1991 he traveled to Iraq and documented the impact of the Persian Gulf War and sanctions in his film: Iraq: War Against the People. He can be reached at larryeverest@hotmail.com.

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