



## Sanctions: invisible, silent, deadly

### Repeat of History

The quest to bring the Iran to its knees by the USA (and Australia) has been accelerated by the imposition of sanctions where ordinary Iranians are increasingly caught in the crosshairs.<sup>i</sup>

The US President has been urged to use diplomacy rather than using sanctions that are likely to backfire.<sup>ii</sup> Sanctions actually lead to increased repression and corruption as well as sow the seeds of further alienation between the people of Iran and the United States.

Australia joined with the United States in imposing sanctions against Iran with the aim of preventing it from acquiring nuclear weapons.

The US President signed on to a round of sanctions against Iran in January 2013. The new policies are closer to a true trade embargo, designed to systematically attack and undercut Iran's major financial pillars and threaten the country with economic collapse' and make the economy 'scream'.<sup>iii</sup>

### Sanctions as an Alternative to War

Sanctions are not an alternative to war. They seem invisible, but their effects are highly visible. Deliberately crippling a nation's economy is nothing less than war.<sup>iv</sup> From 1990 to 2003, the sanctions in Iraq were the most comprehensive and devastating ever established in the name of international governance. The 1991 bombing campaign and sanctions brought Iraq's infrastructure to near collapse as well as compromising basic living conditions.<sup>v</sup> Though labelled as humanitarian, they were a humanitarian catastrophe.

### 'Targeted' Sanctions

It is not true that sanctions are 'targeted.' The true nature of so-called 'targeted' sanctions in Iran was revealed before the escalation of sanctions. U.S. and European Union sanctions 'seriously endangered the lives of tens of thousands of patients, particularly children, suffering from special diseases.'<sup>vi</sup>

The UN Secretary General wrote that, 'The sanctions imposed on .....Iran have had significant effects on the general population, including an escalation in inflation, a rise in commodities and energy costs, an increase in the rate of unemployment and a shortage of necessary items, including medicine' and harmed its humanitarian operations.<sup>vii</sup> Foreign medicines needed for Iranians living with cancer, haemophilia, thalassemia, kidney problems and other diseases were no longer available.<sup>viii</sup>

Another report<sup>ix</sup> also noted that 'millions of lives are at risk in Iran because western economic sanctions are hitting the importing of medicines and hospital equipment.' Many will recall Madeleine Albright's affirmation as US Secretary of State<sup>x</sup> that U.S. policy objectives in Iraq were worth sacrificing half a million Arab children!! The question remains as to who is listening as ordinary Iranians now, as in Iraq, are treated as so-called legitimate targets; as innocent people have food taken from their mouths and have medicines denied them.



### Assault on Defiance

Noam Chomsky refers to the mafia principle<sup>xi</sup> operating in U.S. foreign policy where ‘defiance’ under any circumstances is not tolerated. This principle was operatin in Iran when the Shah of Iran, a US ally and puppet was overthrown. It happened with Saddam Hussein. This is something that Venezuela as well knows all too well!! There is a heavy price to pay for the crimes of defiance and national independence.<sup>xii</sup>

### Sanctions on Iraq

The sanctions imposed on Iraq (1990 to 2003) were so comprehensive and devastating that brought about the near collapse of Iraq’s infrastructure and threatened the basic conditions necessary to sustain life.<sup>xiii</sup> Critical humanitarian goods were prevented from entering the country. These deliberate US policies ensured the continuation of Iraq’s catastrophic condition which Australia and the United Kingdom collaborated in.

For 13 years anything related to electricity, telecommunications, and transportation could not be imported; requisites for agriculture and housing construction were blocked; and equipment and materials needed for health care and food preparation were denied. Glue, water pipes, water tankers, thermos flasks, ambulance radios and irrigation equipment were blocked in case they were used for nefarious purposes. To prevent the possible production of biological and chemical weapons, all science education above the secondary school level ceased. This ridiculous scenario meant that yogurt and cheese could not be produced and eggs were eliminated due to the remote danger that egg yolks might be used to grow viruses, and thus for biological weapons.<sup>xiv</sup> The policy that justified sanctions exceeded any rational concern with security. It reduced Iraq to the most primitive possible condition. The sanity and legality of reducing a nation to a preindustrial state and bankrupting it for the purpose of containing a tyrant was rarely questioned.

### Morality of Sanctions

Sanctions against Iran have not achieved the objectives intended, except as a stand-in for military action by the United States or Israel.<sup>xv</sup> Sanctions may actually have assisted Iran’s regime to implement economic reforms that would have been otherwise difficult.<sup>xvi</sup>

Sanctions have served multiple purposes: to uphold democracy, protect human rights, reverse armed aggression and prevent weapons proliferation. The conventional belief is that they are mostly symbolic and have little practical impact; that they placate public demands for action but do not achieve real results.<sup>xvii</sup> All sanctions have severe humanitarian and social consequences; foster black market criminality (often controlled by state forces or paramilitary groups; harm the very constituencies within a country that were most supportive of advancing human rights norms; strengthen the repressive forces against which sanctions are supposedly aimed without achieved the desired political changes. Sanctions must avoid generating new humanitarian crises.<sup>xviii</sup>

### Toward ‘Sanctions Reform’

UN humanitarian agencies have called for social impact assessments before sanctions are imposed. They emphasise the need for targeted sanctions that deny decision-making elites access to specific financial and other resources whilst avoiding harm to innocent or vulnerable populations, e.g., the freezing of assets and blocking of financial transactions; arms and military



technology embargoes; and travel sanctions, including visa restrictions on designated individuals and aviation sanctions against specific countries or territories.

Sanctions work best as instruments of persuasion, not punishment. Whilst not able to achieve major objectives such as regime change, they can impose sufficient pressure to cause a regime to evaluate the costs and benefits of pursuing policies the international community condemns. Concessions by a target regime should be rewarded with an easing of coercive pressure; partial compliance should be met by a partial lifting of sanctions.

The more effective and ethical approach would be to reciprocate concessions, combining sanctions with incentives as part of a bargaining dynamic to resolve an impasse. Such an approach combines effectiveness with ethics in ways that can sustain moral sanctions.

As a strategy the practices and standards for their use need substantial reform. Greater effort is needed to assess and mitigate the potential humanitarian consequences of sanctions. Pressure should be applied against decision-making elites, rather than vulnerable populations. Sanctions need to be seen as tools of coercive diplomacy designed to resolve conflict, not punishment. With such reforms, sanctions are more likely to be effective and result in political gain and be more ethical with less civilian pain.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Joy Gordon has warned about the future use—and misuse—of sanctions which in Iraq saw a willingness to see appalling things done in the name of security. ‘We must come to grips with the perversity of this. It is simply not good enough to say that atrocities committed for the right reasons, or by respected international organizations, are not really atrocities after all.’<sup>xx</sup> She cites Israel’s pettiness that now allows potato chips into Gaza as they no longer pose a security threat to Israel.<sup>xx</sup>

Because economic sanctions are intended to inflict great human suffering, pain, harm, and even death and thus should be subject to the same kind of careful moral and ethical scrutiny given to the use of military force before it is chosen as a means to achieve national political objectives.’ And ‘because sanctions are themselves a form of violence, they cannot legitimately be seen merely as a peacekeeping device, or as a tool for enforcing international law....They require the same level of justification as other acts of warfare’.<sup>xxi</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The sanctions imposed on Iraq violated both the criteria that must be met before going to war, such as just cause and the probability of success, and the criteria for how the war is conducted, employing such norms as proportionality and discrimination,’ which bars directly intended attacks on non-combatants and non-combatant targets.

The comprehensive economic sanctions also employed against Haiti in 1991 and Cuba since the 1960s, as in Iraq in 1990, have failed to achieve their goals while at the same imposing devastating hardships on the civilian population.

Sanctions are ‘a form of violence—no less than guns and bombs’.



### Sources

Anderson, David E., *The Ethics of Sanctions* **Religion and Ethics Newsweekly** [www.pbs.org](http://www.pbs.org) September 13th, 2010

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/episodes/by-topic/human-rights/the-ethics-of-sanctions/7016/>

Anderson, David E., *Drones and the Ethics of War*. **Religion and Ethics News Weekly** May 14, 2010

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/2010/05/14/drones-and-the-ethics-of-war/6290/>

Arbutnot, Felicity, *Iraq: A Twenty Two Year Genocide* **Dissident Voice**, January 17, 2013

John Scales Avery *Sanctions As Collective Punishment* **Countercurrents.org** January 20, 2013

Avery, John Scales, *The Training Of Soldiers* **Countercurrents.org** October 18, 2012

Chelala, Cesar, *Putting the Iran 'Threat' in Perspective* **CounterPunch** February 26, 2013

Coles, T.J., *Remembering Iraq: The Sanctions Genocide* **Axis of Logic** August 3, 2013

Cortright, David, *Humanitarian Sanctions? The Moral and Political Issues*

Human Rights Brief is a publication of **The Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law at Washington College of Law**, American University. 1995

Cortright, David, and Lopez, George A., *Toward Ethical Economic Sanctions* **America** November 25, 2000

<http://americamagazine.org/issue/390/article/toward-ethical-economic-sanctions>

Dalecki, Maggie, *Are Economic Sanctions Ethical?* **The Ethics Blog** October 1, 2012

<http://ethicsblog.ca/archives/44>

Davenport, Kelsey, *U.S. Sanctions and the Nuclear Endgame in Iran* **e-International Relations**, July 24, 2012

Erdbring, Thomas, and Sanger, David E., *U.S. Ratchets Up an Economic War Against Tehran*, **New York Times** February 6, 2013

Everest, Larry, *Sanctions, Weapons of Mass Death and Destruction* **Countercurrents.org** January 20, 2013

Fathollah-Nejad, Ali, *Collateral Damages of Smart Sanctions on Iran* **e-International Relations** April 19, 2010

Fayazmanesh, Sasan, *War By Other Means The Forces Behind Iran's Currency Crisis*

**CounterPunch**, October 11, 2012

Germanos, Andrea, *Iran (Once Again): 'We Don't Want Nuclear Weapons'* **Common Dreams** January 16, 2013

Germanos, Andrea, *Western Sanctions Spark Health Crisis for Millions of Iranians*

*Life-saving medicines, patients casualties of 'sweeping sanctions'* **Common Dreams** January 14, 2013

Gordon, Joy, *Economic Sanctions, Just War Doctrine, and the 'Fearful Spectacle of the Civilian Dead'* **Cross Currents** Fall 1999, Vol. 49 Issue 3. <http://www.crosscurrents.org/gordon.htm>

Gordon, Joy, *Invisible War: The United States and the Iraq Sanctions* Harvard University Press 2010



Gordon, Joy, *Sanctioning Death in Iraq* **Commonweal** February 10, 2012

Grossman, Agnieszka, *A Critical Assessment of the 1267 Sanctions Committee* **e-International Relations**, March 3, 2012

Hallinan, Conn, *Iran Sanctions: War by Other Means* [Foreign Policy in Focus](#) July 14, 2012

Henry, Jessica, *To what extent can the 1990 sanctions placed on Iraq be judged according to Humanitarian Law?* **e-International Relations**, July 26, 2011

Heydarian, Javad, *Will Sanctions Change Iran's Nuclear Calculus?* **e-International Relations** June 11, 2012

Hufbauer, Gary Clyde, Schott, Jeffrey J., and Oegg, Barbara, *Using Sanctions to Fight Terrorism* **Peterson Institute for International Economics** November 2001

Imonti, Felix, *The other side of sanctions* **ON LINE opinion** Thursday, 16 August 2012

Lamb, Franklin, *Israel Instructs Obama: 'Iranian And Syrian Sanctions Are Not Painful Enough!'* **Countercurrents.org** February 23, 2013

Leupp, Gary, *The Evil of Madeleine Albright* **Dissident Voice**, October 18th, 2010

Leverett, Flynt, and Leverett, Hillary Mann, *The Strategic and Moral Bankruptcy of U.S. Sanctions Policy Toward Iran* **Information Clearing House** April 17, 2013

Lopez, George A., *Don't Just Do Something: Getting Sanctions Right* **Commonweal** June 6, 2008

Lopez, George A., *Toward Ethical Economic Sanctions* **America** November 25, 2000

Marjai, Farid, and Shahabi, Mehrnaz, *'Iranian Mothers For Peace' Alert The World On Sanctions And Shortage of Medicines* **Monthly Review** February 3, 2013

Meyssan, Thierry, *The Sanctions On Iran Are Against International Law*, **Countercurrents.org** March, 5, 2013

Newcombe, Hanna, *The ethics of economic sanctions* **Peace Magazine** Jan-Feb 1998

Pilger, John, *The Political Trial of a Caring Man and the End of Justice in America* **Dissident Voice** November 10, 2012

Postel, Danny, *Iran, the Left and the Non-Aligned Movement: A Guide for the Perplexed* **SpeakOut** September 10, 2012

Ridout, Scott, *An Ethical Analysis of the Modern Sanctions Regime Against Iran* **e-International Relations**, August 15, 2012

Robbins, Carla Anne, *Why Economic Sanctions Rarely Work* **Bloomberg Businessweek** May 23, 2013  
<http://www.businessweek.com/articles/2013-05-23/why-economic-sanctions-rarely-work#p2>

Ross, Niel, *Are Sanctions an Appropriate Tool for Coercion in International Politics? Why?* **e-International Relations**, December 22, 2007



Salami, Ismail, *Carnage or Sanctions? Six Million Iranian Lives at Stake* **Dissident Voice**, October 19, 2012

Salami, Ismail, *Iran Sanctions: US War of Nerves* **Dissident Voice** August 6, 2012

Sande, Erik, *What makes a successful sanctions regime?* **e-International Relations**, January 25, 2012

Sanger, David E., *New Report Is Critical Of US Sanctions On Iran: Urges White House to Rethink Policy* **Information Clearing House – New York Times** April 17, 2013

<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/18/world/middleeast/report-on-iran-urges-obama-to-rethink-sanctions.html?ref=world&r=3&>

Schreiner, Ben, *Sanctioning Iran: Punishing the Crime of Defiance* **Dissident Voice** January 8, 2013

Sepahpour-Ulrich, Soraya, *Sanctions: Diplomacy's Weapon of Mass Murder* **Countercurrents.org** August 4, 2012

Smith, Stanfield, *What North Koreans Think* **CounterPunch** April 8, 2013

-  
Surya, Radha, *Slouching Towards Tehran* **Countercurrents.org** April 5, 2013

Wei He, *Can 'International Sanctions' in Foreign Policy be Ethical?* **e-International Relations**, August 27, 2011 <http://www.e-ir.info/2011/08/27/can-%E2%80%98international-sanctions%E2%80%99-in-foreign-policy-be-ethical/>

Zandman, H.J.G., *Economic sanctions: an ethical primer* Covenant College, ACT AUSTRALIA

Ziabari, Kourosh, *Who is the Winner of the Sanctions Game?* **Dissident Voice July 14, 2012**



<sup>i</sup> [Strategic Options for Iran: Balancing pressure with diplomacy April 17, 2013.](#)

<http://www.scribd.com/doc/136389836/Strategic-Options-for-Iran-Balancing-Pressure-with-Diplomacy#fullscreen>.

<sup>ii</sup> David E. Sanger *New Report Is Critical of US Sanctions on Iran: Urges White House to Rethink Policy* **New York Times** April 17, 2013,

<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/18/world/middleeast/report-on-iran-urges-obama-to-rethink-sanctions.html?ref=world&r=1&>

<sup>iii</sup> Joby Warrick, *New Iran sanctions target industry in bid for deal curbing nuclear program*, **The Washington Post**, January 7, 2013 [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/new-iran-sanctions-target-industry-in-bid-for-deal-curbing-nuclear-program/2013/01/06/e6a8735e-56b4-11e2-8b9e-dd8773594efc\\_story.html?wp\\_login\\_redirect=0](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/new-iran-sanctions-target-industry-in-bid-for-deal-curbing-nuclear-program/2013/01/06/e6a8735e-56b4-11e2-8b9e-dd8773594efc_story.html?wp_login_redirect=0)

[http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/new-iran-sanctions-target-industry-in-bid-for-deal-curbing-nuclear-program/2013/01/06/e6a8735e-56b4-11e2-8b9e-dd8773594efc\\_story.html?wp\\_login\\_redirect=0](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/new-iran-sanctions-target-industry-in-bid-for-deal-curbing-nuclear-program/2013/01/06/e6a8735e-56b4-11e2-8b9e-dd8773594efc_story.html?wp_login_redirect=0)

<sup>iv</sup> David E. Sanger *art. cit.*

<sup>v</sup> Joy Gordon *Invisible War: The United States and the Iraq Sanctions* Harvard University Press 2010.

<sup>vi</sup> The Iranian Haemophilia Society warned the World Health Organization U.S., EU sanctions have endangered lives of Iranian patients: Iranian haemophilia society **Tehran Times** August 11, 2012

<http://www.tehrantimes.com/politics/100481-us-eu-sanctions-have-endangered-lives-of-iranian-patients-iranian-hemophilia-society>

<sup>vii</sup> Michelle Nichols and Louis Charbonneau *U.N. chief says sanctions on Iran affecting its people* October 5, 2012

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/10/05/us-iran-sanctions-un-idUSBRE89412Z20121005>).

<sup>viii</sup> Thomas Erdbring, *Iran Sanctions Take Unexpected Toll on Medical Imports*, **New York Times** November 2, 2012

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/03/world/middleeast/iran-sanctions-take-toll-on-medical-imports.html?pagewanted=all>).

<sup>ix</sup> Saeed Kamali Dehghan, *Iran sanctions 'putting millions of lives at risk* **The Guardian** October 18, 2012

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/oct/17/iran-sanctions-lives-at-risk>

<sup>x</sup> Rahul Mahajan *We Think the Price Is Worth It* **Fair**, November 1, 2001 <http://fair.org/extra-online-articles/we-think-the-price-is-worth-it/>

<sup>xi</sup> Mamoon Alabbasi, 'No change in US "Mafia principle"' <http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=35407>)

<sup>xii</sup> David E. Sanger *New Report Is Critical Of US Sanctions on Iran: Urges White House to Rethink Policy* **Information Clearing House -NY Times** April 17, 2013.

<sup>xiii</sup> Joy Gordon, *Invisible War: The United States and the Iraq Sanctions* Harvard University Press 2010.

<sup>xiv</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>xv</sup> Flynt Leverett and Hillary Mann Leverett, *The Strategic and Moral Bankruptcy of U.S. Sanctions Policy Toward Iran*, **Information Clearing House** April 17, 2013.



<sup>xvi</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>xvii</sup> George A. Lopez *Toward Ethical Economic Sanctions* **America** November 25, 2000

<sup>xviii</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>xix</sup> Joy Gordon, *Invisible War: The United States and the Iraq Sanctions* Harvard University Press.

<sup>xx</sup> Joy Gordon, *Lessons we should have learned from the Iraqi sanctions* **Foreign Policy** July 8, 2010  
[http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/07/08/lessons\\_we\\_should\\_have\\_learned\\_from\\_the\\_iraqi\\_sanctions](http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/07/08/lessons_we_should_have_learned_from_the_iraqi_sanctions)

<sup>xxi</sup> *Ibid.*