

Sanctions Will Kill Tens of Thousands of Iranians

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When she was running for president in 2008, Hillary Rodham Clinton threatened to [“obliterate” Iran](#) if it attacked Israel. Her opponent, Barack Obama, responded that Clinton’s threat was [“too much like Bush.”](#) Four years later Iran has not attacked Israel (and will not do so, unless attacked by Israel first), but President Obama is actually carrying out the threat that his current secretary of state made in 2008, waging an undeclared war on Iran and Iranians. The U.S. and Israel have launched [cyber attacks](#), assassinated Iranian [nuclear scientists](#), and supported armed ethnic groups that [carry out terrorist operations](#) inside Iran, killing innocent people. In addition, Israel has been active in the [Kurdistan region of Iraq](#) and [in the Republic of Azerbaijan](#), encouraging and supporting small separatist movements among Iranian ethnic groups, such as the Kurds and Azeris.

But the most devastating part of the undeclared war on Iran is the tough economic sanctions that the U.S. and its allies in the European Union (EU) have imposed on Iran. Officially, the sanctions are supposed to be “smart” and “targeted,” aiming only to hurt the Iranian government, particularly the Iran’s Revolutionary Guard Corps, the most powerful part of Iran’s military. But in reality, the most vulnerable members of Iranian society, namely, millions of ordinary Iranians, have suffered the most. Not only have they been hurt badly by the sanctions, but tens of thousands of them, if not more, will also lose their lives if the sanctions continue, even without being tightened further.

The supposedly “smart” sanctions that the United States and its EU allies have imposed on Iran have been expanded to all areas, even if they are not part of the official sphere of sanctions. This is because the U.S. and its EU allies have imposed sanctions on Iran’s Central Bank and practically all other Iranian banks that are involved in commercial transactions with the outside world. Since these banks open lines of credit for exports and imports and provide financial guarantees for commerce with the outside world, it has become very difficult, if not impossible, to import vital good and products into the country.

An area that has been particularly hit hard is the pharmaceutical sector. Although Iran produces a large part of the medications and drugs that its population needs, based on the generic versions of brand-name pharmaceuticals, it is unable to produce the most advanced drugs that have come to the market over the past 10–15 years that deal with a variety of illnesses and medical problems, simply because their generic versions are not yet available. As a result, Iran must still import a significant amount of drugs every year to deal with illnesses such as leukemia and AIDS. But the sanctions that the United States and its allies have imposed on Iran’s banks and other financial institutions have made importing necessary drugs and medical instruments almost impossible. At the same time, as Iran’s oil exports continue to decrease because of the sanctions, the financial resources of the nation become increasingly strained, making it more difficult to pay for expensive drugs, even if a way can

be found to import them. As a result, the shortage of drugs will soon become a catastrophe if not addressed. I have been able to personally verify the shortage, as two of my brothers-in-law are pharmacists and run large pharmacies in Iran. They have confirmed to me that the crisis is reaching dangerous levels.

The board of directors of the Iranian Hemophilia Society recently [informed](#) the [World Federation of Hemophilia](#) that the lives of tens of thousands of children are being endangered by the lack of proper drugs caused by international economic sanctions. According to the Society, while the export of drugs to Iran has not been banned, the sanctions imposed on the Central Bank of Iran and the country's other financial institutions have severely disrupted the purchase and transfer of medical goods. Describing itself as a nonpolitical organization that has been active for 45 years, the Society condemned the "inhumane and immoral" U.S. and EU sanctions and appealed to international organizations for help.

Tens of thousands of Iranian boys and men have hemophilia and need certain drugs that must be imported. Many of them need surgery for a variety of reasons, but in the absence of proper drugs for their hemophilia, the surgeries cannot be performed. In fact, [several reports from](#) Iran indicate that all surgeries for all hemophiliac patients have been canceled.

But the problem is not restricted to hemophiliacs. [Reports indicate](#) that advanced drugs for a variety of cancers (particularly leukemia), heart diseases, lung problems, multiple sclerosis, and thalassemia cannot be imported, endangering the lives of tens of thousands of people. There are about [37,000 Iranians](#) with multiple sclerosis, a debilitating disease that can be controlled only with advanced medications; without them, the patients will die. And given that, even under the best medical conditions, [40,000 Iranians lose](#) their lives to cancer every year, and that it has been predicted by many experts that Iran will have a "[cancer tsunami](#)" by 2015, because every year 70,000–80,000 [new cases of cancer](#) are identified in Iran, the gravity of the situation becomes even more glaring.

Considering that over the last year economic sanctions against Iran have been tightened and that sanctions against Iran's financial institutions went into effect only over the last few months, the above statistics must be seen as preliminary. As the sanctions drag on and the West tries to dry up all of Iran's earnings from oil, not only will the drug shortage kill a large number of Iranians, but shortages of food and other important products may also become significant. When the West imposed economic sanctions on Iraq in the 1990s, a very large number of Iraqi children lost their lives as a result. The most reliable estimate of the number of dead, provided by UNICEF, put it around [500,000](#). Given that Iran's population is three times that of Iraq, if the sanctions imposed on Iran last several years, the number of dead could be much higher than in Iraq.

In the meantime, the sanctions have not affected the hardline position of Iran's Revolutionary Guard and Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has called for the development of a "resistance economy" in order to resist the pressure by the West. There are already voices both within Iran and in the diaspora that call on the Iranian leadership to compromise with the West. The U.S. can make such voices stronger and louder if it offers to lift some of the sanctions in return for more flexibility by Iran, particularly regarding its enrichment of uranium to 19.75%. But, under pressure from Israel and its American allies in an election year, the president and his advisers have been unyielding. The U.S. offered Iran practically nothing in the negotiations in Moscow but demanded that Iran give up one of its most important negotiation cards, namely, enrichment of uranium to 19.75% and the facility where

this is done, the Fordow site near Qom. The result has been only more suffering by ordinary Iranians.

It may be useless to preach to the Obama administration about the human toll of its policy toward Iran, given that the president has continued the destructive Middle East policies of George W. Bush and has been even tougher and more harmful to the Iranian people. When United States citizens abroad are assassinated with the president's approval and without due process and when Salafi and Wahhabi thugs in Syria supported by one of the worst religious dictatorships in the world, Saudi Arabia, are hailed by the administration as "freedom fighters," it's absurd to expect the president to have a moral policy toward Iran.

But the emerging catastrophe will be an ethical and moral problem for the West for decades to come, a catastrophe that is being created simply because the West blindly pursues crippling sanctions on Iran in order to stop a nonexistent nuclear weapons program at the urging of the War Party in the U.S. and its Israeli allies.