

WARRICK PROMOTES NEOCON FRAMING OF NEWEST IRAN SANCTIONS

Despite crippling smog in Tehran that may well derive from sanctions aimed at refined gasoline and the UN noting several months ago that US sanctions against Iran “appear to be affecting humanitarian operations in the country”, Joby Warrick chose to frame the newest round of US sanctions against Iran in language provided directly by the neocon “think tank” Foundation for the Defense of Democracies.

Warrick does briefly note in his opening paragraphs that the sanctions against Iran have its “economy already reeling”, but he doesn’t dwell on the impact to Iranian citizens of that reeling economy. Instead, he moves directly into neocon “think” with this passage (and Warrick doesn’t even get the group’s name correct):

While some previous U.S. sanctions targeted individuals and firms linked to Iran’s nuclear industry, 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, the officials say.

“This is effectively blacklisting whole sectors of the Iranian economy,” said Mark Dubowitz, executive director of the Foundation for the Defense of Democracy[sic], a think tank. “The goal is to create a chilling effect on all nonhumanitarian commercial trade with Iran.”

By broadening the focus to entire industries, the new effort is intended to make it harder for Iran to evade

sanctions through front operations, a time-honored practice in the Islamic republic, said Dubowitz, author of several studies on sanctions policy. “It was a game of whack-a-mole that the United States could never win,” he said.

Dubowitz’s framing casts those crafty Iranians as creating a game of “whack-a-mole” as they try to evade the sanctions, which he whitewashes as being aimed at “chilling all nonhumanitarian aid”. No less an authority than the UN, in a report titled “Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran” and dated August 22, 2012, demonstrates that Dubowitz’s characterization of the sanctions is a lie, since even before this newest round, there are humanitarian effects from the sanctions:

The sanctions also appear to be affecting humanitarian operations in the country. Even companies that have obtained the requisite licence to import food and medicine are facing difficulties in finding third-country banks to process the transactions. Owing to payment problems, several medical companies have stopped exporting medicines to the Islamic Republic of Iran, leading to a reported shortage of drugs used in the treatment of various illnesses, including cancer, heart and respiratory conditions, thalassemia and multiple sclerosis.

Despite Dubowitz’s attempt to paint the sanctions as merely economic, we learned last fall that the severe impact on Iran’s economy has been devastating to its citizens. More from the UN report:

The sanctions imposed on the Islamic Republic of 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. A number of Iranian non-governmental organizations and activists have expressed concerns about the growing impact of sanctions on the population and have noted that inflation, rising prices of commodities, subsidy cuts and sanctions are compounding each other and having far-reaching effects on the general population. They report, for instance, that people do not have access to lifesaving medicines. Furthermore, since the sanctions extend to banking transactions, many foreign banks have stopped doing business with the Islamic Republic of Iran altogether, which has made it considerably difficult for Iranians to transfer funds and for private business to obtain lines of credit.

We learn from The Atlantic Wire that the current smog crisis in Tehran may be a result of the sanctions:

In the last year alone, air pollution in Tehran left 4,460 dead, and the problem's getting worse. The news arrived after the entire city had been shut down for five days in an attempt to keep cars off the road and clear the air which residents say stings their eyes and irritates their throats if they don't wear masks or scarves to filter out the pollutants.

/snip/

It's not really geography's fault that Tehran's air is so filthy. Thanks to strict sanctions on refined gasoline imposed by the United States in 2010, all of Iran has struggled to come up with enough fuel for its cars, so the people have been improvising and mixing

their own – call it bathtub gas. It's dirty stuff, too. In 2009, the country reported 300 "healthy days" in terms of air quality, but that number had dropped to 150 by 2011.

Warrick is not unique, however, in his attempt to sanitize the effects of the sanctions. A Reuters "Special Report" from December 28 titled "Inside the West's economic war with Iran" focuses entirely on how the US shaped its oil sanctions against Iran to prevent a major rise in international oil prices but completely overlooked the impact of the sanctions on Iranian citizens.

The neocon bloodlust for war with Iran has been allowed to shape Washington's thinking on Iran sanctions so completely that the effects of the sanctions on the Iranian people are quietly swept under the rug while the new sanctions are gleefully described as "whacking" those Iranian "moles" who try to get past the previous sanctions. Note, too, that number two on the neocon hit list against Chuck Hagel in his nomination to be defense secretary (after his failure to be properly militant in defense of Israel) is the default in "his seriousness about the Iranian nuclear threat".

Despite the miserable failures of the neocons' views on all fronts, their influence in Washington appears to be just as strong as ever. They may not stop the confirmation of Hagel, but they otherwise have everything they want in promoting the interests of Israel over those of the US and causing unending hardship for Iranian citizens.