

# SMASH THE



**HANDS OFF  
THE PEOPLE OF IRAN!** [www.hopoi.org](http://www.hopoi.org)

## **BRIEFING PAPER**

1. It is wrong to counterpose sanctions to military action. In themselves sanctions are a form of 'soft war' and often pave the way for armed aggression of some sort. Since the Middle Ages, the tactic of laying siege to a town or village has played a crucial role in military campaigns. It imposes hunger, demoralisation and desperation onto the 'besieged community' and in this way softens up the regime either for external military attack or overthrow from within.
2. Thus, is it ominous that the severity and the extent of sanctions against Iran have dramatically increased over the last 12 months. The fact that a new raft are being promised by the US president, including against the import of refined fuel, is deeply worrying. This specific threat is particularly disastrous for masses of Iranian people given the country's inability to produce refined oil. (See points 12 & 13 below).
3. The example of Iraq should inform our approach to sanctions. The 1990 UN-imposed sanctions on the Saddam regime had the express goals of eliminating Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) and extended range ballistic missiles, prohibiting any support for terrorism, forcing Iraq to pay war reparations to Kuwait and all foreign debt. Some researchers estimate that over a million Iraqis died as a result – with a disproportionately high number of children amongst them.
4. Sanctions hit the working class hardest, not the regime or the rich. Effectively, they disorganise this class and squander its fighting energies as life is filled simply with the day-to-day struggle to survive. In this way, sanctions actually increase the power of the reactionary regime over the masses of people, which shows they are clearly not designed to increase the strength of the people below.
5. Goods estimated at a value of more than £6 billion are smuggled into Iran every year. Transactions on this scale could not happen without the direct involvement of government officials and the help of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). For the last 30 years the IRGC and the local Islamic committees have been the main distribution centres for 'un-Islamic goods', including alcoholic drinks, Barbie dolls, western music and films. Sanctions give these 'distribution centres' even more economic and political powers, as they now control the circulation of many more goods.
6. Similarly, Yahoo and Microsoft removed Iran from the list of countries they served in 2007 and Paltalk does not allow free access to its public rooms from Iran. So while Iranian state officials and the security service have unlimited access to the internet via government servers, students, working class and political activists are restricted and have to adopt potentially hazardous ways round the ban.
7. There is even a recognition amongst the more far-sighted elements of the theocratic regime that the pressure from the US – including the imposition of sanctions – actually strengthens their stranglehold on the society. This explains, for instance, the blank rejection by Iran's foreign minister of Barack Obama's recent 'carrot and stick' initiative.

8. Hopi sees the working people of Iran as the force for progressive social change. Thus we want this class to be organised, strong and able to challenge the theocracy for power. Sanctions – like an imperialist military strike – are a disaster for the cause of democracy and progressive social change in Iran. This is why Hopi encourages direct international working class solidarity with the aim of building the fighting capacity of the movement in Iran. This stands in stark contrast to the funds set up by the US administration to support those Iranian NGOs who follow US policy in the region (including regime change from above) and the neo-liberal economic agenda that has already proved such a disaster for the Iranian masses.
9. For all the talk of “change”, Barack Obama’s plans for new sanctions prove the continuity of a policy of pressure on Iran that goes back to 1981 and the first US-imposed sanctions. Obama and Hillary Clinton are staunch supporters of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, so their comments that they will not tolerate a nuclear Iran must be taken seriously, including Clinton’s chilling threat to “totally obliterate” the country in the event of an attack on Israel.
10. Iran’s economy is suffering from the cumulative effects of old and new sanctions. Many proposed oil and petrochemical deals have been abandoned. Since the spring of 2008, Royal Dutch Shell, Spain’s Repsol and a Japanese oil company have pulled out of planned projects in Iran, after coming under pressure from the US. This has swelled the already colossal numbers of the unemployed. Similarly, the car industry and many firms related to this sector face shortages of essential engineering equipment and spare parts. As a result, the contracts of tens of thousands of workers have been ended.
11. Against the backdrop of the world economic crisis, most Iranian banks face additional uncertainty as they are all listed in the 2007 UN sanctions.  

“This is slowly taking away Iran's ability to issue letters of credit and thus increasing its cost of trade. In addition, Iran is finding that it will have no access to international capital markets; its only theoretical access to international credit will be at the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, both of which the US can easily block.”  
[http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle\\_East/JK20Ak01.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/JK20Ak01.html)
12. Hospitals in Iran are reporting a shortage of medical diagnostic kits and surgical equipment as a direct result of sanctions blocking import of “dual-use” equipment.
13. The disastrous effect of sanctions on the Iranian economy is exacerbated by the country’s heavy reliance on oil revenues. In early 2008, the Iranian president predicted that oil prices will not go down below \$140 a barrel. As late as November 2008, Ahmadinejad claimed that even if the price of oil fell below \$5 a barrel, Iran’s economy will be fine. Yet in the last couple of weeks the government has acknowledged publicly for the first time that the country's economy is suffering badly from tumbling oil prices. As temperatures drop to below zero in northern provinces, the government is considering cutting subsidies that keep heating and automobile fuel prices low as well as imposing rationing. Iran imports some \$350 million worth of refined fuel per month, an inflow that is now vulnerable to Obama-imposed sanctions, of course.
14. Already, the imposition of limited fuel rationing in the winter of 2007 caused riots and demonstrations, especially in the Northern provinces where winter temperatures often drop to well below zero. Economists have also warned that cutting fuel subsidies will see Iran's inflation shoot up to more than 50 percent. The rate of inflation is currently just below 30%.
15. The current prominence of sanctions in the armorory of imperialist pressure on Iran should not distract us from the continuing threat of a military attack.