STOP THE ATTACK ON IRAN. Iran presents no threat to the US. Threatening Iran violates the UN Charter. No peacemaking is as important as opposing and trying to prevent unjust war. Speak up, write, call, donate, don’t give up on reason and diplomacy; don’t let the fear/warmongers control us.

Contents Nos. 13-17 at end.

Beginning with #18 OMNI's Iran Newsletter will feature Brodhead's splendid reports via Historians Against War (HAW). Scroll down for them, or to arrange to receive them directly.

Contents of #18
Petition Not to Attack
Pledge of Resistance
Abrahamian, The 1953 CIA Coup

Cumings, et al., Inventing the Axis of Evil

Special Section: Frank Brodhead, Iran War Weekly

Contents #19
Iran No? US No! Abolish Nuclear Weapons.
Brodhead, Iran War Weekly July 22
Brodhead, Iran War Weekly August 12
Froomkin, Iraq-Iran Alliance
Greenwald, Blaming Iran

Nuke ops halted after protesters enter TN complex -
Nuclear operations were temporarily halted Wednesday at a Tennessee complex that stores and processes uranium after three protesters, including a nun, were able to intrude into a high-security area over the weekend. The Y-12 National Security Complex said all nuclear material is safe. 


Iran War Weekly - July 22, 2012
fbrodhead@aol.com via uark.edu
Historians Against the War is posting Frank Brodhead's "Iran War Weekly," as a helpful resource for our members and friends. Frank earned a PhD in history at Princeton University and has co-authored several books on US foreign policy. He is a scholar and political activist who has worked with peace and social justice movements for many years. In 2010-2011 he produced the “Afghanistan War Weekly,” which was widely used by antiwar groups across the country.

Iran War Weekly
July 22, 2012

Hello All – The US/Israel-Iran conflict over Iran’s nuclear program was overshadowed this week by a dramatic increase in the fighting in Syria. With the armed insurgency now reaching inside Damascus and Aleppo, and inflicting mortal wounds on the Assad regime’s inner circle, some of the good/useful reading linked below addresses the question of the implications for the war in Syria on Iran, and the possibilities that the fighting will spill over into the region.

One illustration of the hair-trigger tensions in the region was the immediate Israeli threat to respond against Iran and/or Hezbollah for their alleged role in the terrorist bombing in Bulgaria. This is examined below as an example of the way that media bias reflects the power interests of ruling elites in the United States and Israel, greasing the path to war in the absence of critical thought.

Also among the good/useful reading linked below, I especially recommend the essay by two Iranian scholars on why Iran does not want a nuclear weapon, Trita Parsi’s essay on the dynamics that make war with Iran appear “inevitable,” and the several essays on Syria’s armed opposition and the complexities of the uprising against the Assad regime.

Once again, I appreciate the help that many of you have given in
Hello All – Negotiations about Iran’s nuclear program remain suspended, as the US-led opposition to Iran focuses on the effect of sanctions (economic war) on Iran and the possibility that the sanctions will coerce Iran to modify its negotiating positions. The good/useful reading linked below includes several essays on the devastating and (often) hidden impact of sanctions on ordinary people.

To lead off this section, I’ve included a recent article by Joy Gordon, the author of the main studies on the impact of sanctions on Iraq from 1990 to 2003. These sanctions are estimated to have killed (“premature deaths”) as many as 1.7 million people (in a country one-third the size of Iran). Gordon’s analysis is a cautionary tale of what could/might happen in Iran — if we allow it. Publicity about the human cost of sanctions, and a need to end them asap, could be a useful peace movement activity, beginning now. Few Americans will understand the nuts and bolts of debates about 3.5% enriched uranium, but everyone can understand that it’s wrong to inflict suffering on ordinary Iranians by cutting off their food and medicine.

Some other essays give interesting insights into what’s going on inside Iran that might affect Iran’s diplomacy around its nuclear program. Iran will hold its next presidential election in June 2013, and an article linked below profiles one of the likely candidates.
Two other essays profile some of the history of Iran’s nuclear diplomacy, underscoring the sharp change of course brought by the Ahmadinejad presidency (2005).

Based on reports in the Israeli media this week, the “bomb Iran” issue has set off another political meltdown within the Israeli political elite. Once again Netanyahu and Barak’s pro-war posture has been met by strong criticism from retired (and some active-duty) military and intelligence leaders. One puzzling note was Barak’s statement that a “new” US intelligence estimate placed Iran as being much closer to getting a nuclear weapon than previous US intelligence estimates. But no one in the United States seems to be aware of this “new” estimate. (“What is Obama hiding?”) And this new flurry of war talk comes just after Mitt Romney’s visit to Israel. Will our “October Surprise” come from the Netanyahu/Romney team? Not impossible. There are some interesting reports on all this linked below.

Regarding Syria, we wall-to-wall conflict spilling throughout the region. Clinton’s recent visit to Turkey could presage an escalation in foreign military intervention – or not. Largely unnoticed in “Western” media this week was the meeting re: Syria in Tehran, which attracted a reasonable number of participants and is attempting to develop an alternative consensus to a negotiating position that is pre-conditioned on Assad leaving. Can the United States maintain its coalition of supporters re: Syria if a principle of unity is to exclude Iran from any role in peace negotiations? [Dick: I deleted the Syrian essays. To read them see immediately below.]

Once again, I appreciate the help that many of you have given in distributing the Iran War Weekly and/or linking it on websites. Previous “issues” of the IWW can be read at http://warisacrime.org/blog/46383. If you would like to receive the IWW mailings, please send me an email at fbrodhead@aol.com.

Best wishes,
Frank Brodhead
Concerned Families of Westchester (NY)

OVERVIEWS/PERSPECTIVES

Five Myths about the U.S.-Iran Conflict
By Reza Marashi and Reza Sanati, The National Interest [August 6, 2012]

The United States and Iran don’t need any help when it comes to not getting along. The institutionalized enmity goes back three decades—sometimes in spite of the people in Washington or Tehran and other times exacerbated by misperceptions of their respective
national interests. Iran and the United States, after all, are geographically distant, operate on very different systems, and both carry complex cultural and political baggage. All of this misunderstanding combines to foster incomplete or false narratives that can take on a life of their own. Here are five of the most damaging myths—from one or both sides—that have facilitated and exacerbated U.S.-Iran hostility.

http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/five-myths-about-the-us-iran-conflict-7294

The Secret History of America’s Thirty-Year Conflict with Iran

By Barbara Slavin, Al-Monitor [August 6, 2012]

[ FB - This is a useful review of the new book by David Crist, The Twilight War: The Secret History of America’s Thirty-Year Conflict With Iran. Crist’s account is primarily about the Bush years. He is well connected and the son of one of the early leaders of US Central Command (CENTCOM). I found the book annoying and unreadable, but Barbara Slavin does us a service by summarizing it and highlighting some of its useful information.]---- A new book on the long confrontation between the US and Iran blames the George W. Bush administration for squandering opportunities to improve relations with Tehran and invading Iraq in 2003 without recognizing that Iran would wind up being the power broker in that country. Crist argues that the US has been too soft when it should have retaliated for Iran-backed terrorism, and too hard when it should have embraced Iranian diplomatic overtures. The book is based on reams of US government documents, private papers and interviews with 400 former officials and includes severally previously unreported nuggets.


Iran and the Petrodollar Threat to U.S. Empire

By Christopher Doran, New Left Project [August 11, 2012]

---- Iran poses a far more serious threat to the U.S. than its disputed nuclear aspirations. Over the last few years, Iran has unleashed a weapon of mass destruction of a very different kind, one that directly challenges a key underpinning of American hegemony: the U.S. dollar as the exclusive global currency for all oil transactions. It began in 2005, when Iran announced it would form its own International Oil Bourse (IOB), the first phase of which opened in 2008. ... The latest round of U.S. sanctions targets countries that do business with Iran's Central Bank, which, combined with the U.S. and EU oil embargoes, should in theory shut down Iran's ability to export oil and thus force it to abandon its nuclear program by crippling its economy. But instead, Iran is successfully negotiating oil sales via accepting gold, individual national currencies like China's renminbi, and direct bartering.

http://www.zcommunications.org/iran-and-the-petrodollar-threat-to-u-
SANCTIONS

Introduction
US sanctions against Iran have been in place since the Iranian revolution of 1979. Following the referral of the “Iran File” by the IAEA to the UN Security Council in 2006, additional sanctions against Iran - ranging from targeted sanctions against persons involved in Iran’s nuclear program to restrictions on Iran’s imports and exports - have been imposed by the Security Council, the United States, and the European Union. With the current “pause” in the nuclear negotiations that were re-started last spring between Iran and the “P5+1” (the five permanent members of the Security Council plus Germany), the “success” or “failure” of the sanctions in terms of forcing Iran to agree to the negotiating position of the P5+1 - most importantly agreeing to a suspension of nuclear enrichment activities - has reached the front burner of media attention. Supporters of immediate military action against Iran’s nuclear sites argue that the sanctions have not - and will not in the near term - affected Iran’s nuclear program. Those seeking an alternative to military action - or at least to defer military action until after the US presidential election - argue that the sanctions are “beginning to bite.” So “the truth” about the effect of sanctions on Iran is highly politicized.

The impact of the UN sanctions against Iraq following Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait in 1990 is both a cautionary tale and a template for what could/will go wrong with sanctions against Iran. The main study of what happened in Iraq is by Joy Gordon, The Invisible War: The United States and the Iraq Sanctions (2010). Gordon, whose research is supported by many other analysts, recounts the bureaucratic sadism of the UN committee set up decide on “allowable” imports to Iraq under the “oil-for-food” program, with the US representative vetoing just about everything. The sanctions are thought to be responsible for 1.7 million “excess deaths” in Iraq between 1990 and the end of the war (not occupation) in 2003. Below I’ve pasted in a link to a summary essay by Gordon about what happened in Iraq, as well as links to a Democracy Now! interview and a review of Gordon’s book by Andrew Cockburn. And further below I’ve linked several good essays from the past week that examine what’s happening in Iran as a result of the sanctions.

Lessons we should have learned from the Iraqi sanctions
By Joy Gordon, Foreign Policy [July 8, 2012]
---- As the U.S. drives the UN Security Council to tighten sanctions on Iran and the world's attention momentarily focuses on the Gaza blockade, decision makers could benefit from hearing an untold story about the role played by the U.S. in the almost forgotten Security Council sanctions imposed on Iraq for over a decade. Coming on the heels of the massive bombing strikes of the 1991 Gulf War, the
sanctions had a catastrophic humanitarian impact, preventing Iraq from rebuilding or even maintaining its infrastructure. Electricity production, agriculture, water treatment, telecommunications, transportation, health care, and education were all crippled. A UN envoy described the situation in 1991 as "near apocalyptic." The best estimate of "excess child mortality" -- the number of children under five who died during the sanctions who would not have under Iraq's economy and policies before sanctions -- is between 670,000 and 880,000.

http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/07/08/lessons_we_should_have_learned_from_the_iraqi_sanctions

http://www.democracynow.org/2010/9/1/invisible_war_how_thirteen_years_of

Sanctions: Diplomacy’s Weapon of Mass Murder
By Soraya Sepahpour-Ulrich, War is a Crime [August 4, 2012]
---- In 1945, the United States of America dropped two atomic bombs on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagaskai immediately killing 120,000 civilians. Unlike the shock and horror which accompanied the atomic bombs dropped on Japan, there were no images of the 500,000 Iraqi children whose lives were cut short by sanctions to jolt the world into reality. Not only has America taken pride in the mass killing of innocent children, but encouraged by silence and the surrender to its weapon of choice, it has turned diplomacy’s weapon of mass murder on another country – Iran. There has been little resistance to sanctions in the false belief that sanctions are a tool of diplomacy and preferable to war. Enforcement of this belief has been a major victory for American public diplomacy. The reality is otherwise. http://warisacrime.org/content/sanctions-diplomacy%E2%80%99s-weapon-mass-murder

Iran's strategy under new sanctions
By Roxane Farmanfarmaian, Aljazeera [August 10, 2012]
---- The sanctions are designed to force Iran to halt its nuclear programme. The West accuses Iran of using its programme to build a bomb. Iran claims it is only for energy and medical use. Iran has officially responded in three ways:
1. It has threatened to use its enriched uranium to fuel a submarine and to convert its Navy to nuclear power (which would require 92 per cent purity), an example of its uncanny ability to cross red lines before the West even realises there is a red line to be crossed.
2. It has released a position paper outlining its views and goals, and calling for three-monthly talks, an acknowledgement that promises on either side must wait until the upcoming presidential elections.
3. It has embarked on what the media is calling a "charm offensive". Its UN Ambassador has offered assurances it will not ratchet up conflict, a signal it won't immediately close the Strait of Hormuz - though, as sanctions reduce its flows of oil export and goods import, its own cost for doing so drops.

Iran's mild response to the draconian sanctions regime fits what Hossein Mousavian, research scholar at Princeton University and former Iranian nuclear negotiator, calls Iran's post-revolutionary character. Revolutionary idealism, he says, explains Iran's failure to adopt typical realpolitik approaches to threats from other states, such as its failure to respond in kind to Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's use of chemical weapons in the Iran-Iraq War.

http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/08/201288142724224103.html

Also useful — Saeed Kamali Dehghan, “Sanctions on Iran: 'ordinary people are the target.'” The Guardian [UK] [August 10, 2012]
http://original.antiwar.com/sahimi/2012/08/08/sanctions-will-kill-tens-of-thousands-of-iranians/

NEGOTIATIONS ON IRAN’S NUCLEAR PROGRAM
Tale of a Missed Opportunity
By Peter Jenkins, Lobelog [August 6, 2012]
—— When two or more aficionados of the Iranian nuclear controversy are gathered together, the conversation will turn at some point to whether opportunities for resolving the issue peacefully have been missed. Some see a missed opportunity in the first George W. Bush administration’s refusal to countenance an Iranian negotiating proposal transmitted by Switzerland in May 2003. Others lament the inability of France, Germany and the United Kingdom to accept the limited resumption of uranium enrichment in Iran, in 2005, in return for a range of confidence-building measures and safeguards against the diversion of nuclear material to military purposes. I regret that it occurred to no one in the autumn of 2003 to link Iran’s voluntary suspension of work on the development of an enrichment capacity to completion of International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA) verification under the Additional Protocol, a voluntary but advanced nuclear safeguards standard introduced in the mid-1990s.
http://www.lobelog.com/tale-of-a-missed-opportunity/
INSIDE IRAN
Key advisor to Supreme Leader may seek Iran presidency
By Laura Rozen, Al-Monitor [August 5, 2012]
----- Ali Akbar Velayati, the longtime foreign policy advisor to
Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, is likely to run for
Iran’s presidency next year, and if elected would take a more
pragmatic stance to ease soaring tensions with the West that have
isolated Iran and hurt its economy, a former Iranian diplomat told Al
Monitor. The former diplomat expressed optimism that Iran would reach
a negotiated solution with the West over its nuclear program by June
of next year, when Iranian presidential elections are due to be held.
He also said the Iranian foreign ministry may take a larger role in
handling Iran’s negotiations with the P5+1 over its nuclear program
in the future. The larger message the former diplomat conveyed is
that Khamenei, at 73, does not want the end of his legacy in Iranian
history books to be having brought economic hardship to the Iranian
people. http://backchannel.al-monitor.com/index.php/2012/08/1551/key-
advisor-to-supreme-leader-may-seek-iran-presidency/

Iran eyes role as post-Arab Spring 'anchor'
By Kaveh L Afrasiabi, Asia Times [August 7, 2012]
----- Dr Abbas Maleki, former deputy foreign minister of Iran and
currently senior Wilhelm Fellow on Energy Policy at Massachusetts
Institute of Technology, was an important voice in Iran's foreign
policy decision making process for many years. In an interview with
Asia Times Online, Maleki sheds light on how Iran conceptualizes
foreign policy, while challenging negative Western perceptions of
Iran's behavior. He emphasizes Iran's role in regional crisis-
management, particularly in Syria, and explains why the upcoming
summit of leaders of the Non-Aligned Movement, to be held this month
in Tehran, is so important for Iran.

Kaveh Afrasiabi: How would you describe Iran's regional diplomacy?
Abbas Maleki: Well, the best word to describe this is regionalism.
Regionalism forms the core of Iran's foreign policy approach, one
that seeks to integrate the different, and complex, dimensions of
Iran's trans-border relations. This is based on Iran's multi-region
geography - and identity - that encompasses the Persian Gulf, Caspian
Sea, the Central Asia-Caucasus regions and Iran's numerous neighbors
and near-neighbors. In this context, Iran's policy is to have good-
neighborly relations and a calm environment at its borders while
pushing the arch of regional cooperation through a variety of
bilateral and multilateral channels, such as the Economic Cooperation
Organization. Often this means a delicate balancing act between and
among the welter of economic, geopolitical, strategic, and national
security considerations in a very dynamic and even fluid setting,
given the nature of compound problems of insecurity, foreign
intervention, and inadequate institution-building in Iran's vicinity,
which co-exist with tremendous opportunities for cooperation and mutual advancement.

http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/NH07Ak02.html

Iran’s National Security and Nuclear Diplomacy: An Insider’s Take
By Farideh Farhi, LobeLog [August 7, 2012]
[FB - This book (in Persian) complements the recent account of Iran’s nuclear diplomacy by Seyed Hossein Mousavian, The Iranian Nuclear Crisis. The author of the book under review was Mousavian’s boss, and provides an additional perspective and strong critique of Iran’s diplomatic disasters after the election of Ahmadinejad (2005). Several articles by Mousavian have been linked in earlier issues of the IWW.]

National Security and Nuclear Diplomacy was published in Iran during the autumn of 2011 but most people only learned about it a few months ago after it was made available during Tehran’s International Book Fair in May. It’s significant because the author is Hassan Rowhani, the country’s nuclear negotiator for 22 months during the Khatami presidency – just one of the many positions he has held since the inception of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The details revealed in Rowhani’s book about how decisions were made in restarting Iran’s nuclear program in the late 1980s, as well as in negotiations with the EU 3 (Britain, Germany and France) are very interesting.


MELTDOWN IN ISRAEL OVER ATTACKING IRAN
The miraculous antiwar uprising of the Israeli establishment
By Larry Derfner, 972 Magazine [August 10, 2012]

People don’t realize what a miracle is taking place in this country. A revolt by the Israeli military/intelligence establishment and Israel’s best reporters, helped along by President Shimon Peres and ultimately enabled by the Obama administration, is stopping an insane war from being launched by Israel’s two ideologically insane political leaders, a war they’ve been planning for years. Not coincidentally, this shift comes as the heads of all the military and intelligence branches continue to stand solid as a rock against Bibi and Barak’s plans. … Another blast of bad news for Bibi/Barak is that Obama has opened up a substantial lead over Romney; he’s in front by 4% in the polls, and way ahead in most of the “battleground states.” At this point, Israel’s two ubermenschen have to assume that they’re going to have Obama to deal with for a second term when he has no re-election to worry about, and that an attack on Iran on the eve of the November election would look like a Hail Mary attempt to save it for Romney, whom Bibi is making no secret of supporting. In short, Bibi and Barak’s ship continues to sink. http://972mag.com/the-israeli-establishments-miraculous-antiwar-uprising/52611/

U.S. still believes Iran not on verge of nuclear weapon
From Reuters [August 9, 2012]
---- The United States still believes that Iran is not on the verge of having a nuclear weapon and that Tehran has not made a decision to pursue one, U.S. officials said on Thursday. Their comments came after Israeli media reports claimed U.S. President Barack Obama had received a new National Intelligence Estimate saying Iran had made significant and surprising progress toward military nuclear capability. Later, Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak suggested that the new U.S. report, which he acknowledged might be something other than a National Intelligence Estimate, "transforms the Iranian situation into an even more urgent one." But a White House National Security Council spokesman disputed the Israeli reports, saying the U.S. intelligence assessment of Iran's nuclear activities had not changed since intelligence officials delivered testimony to Congress on the issue earlier this year.
http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/08/09/us-israel-iran-usa-idUSBRE8781GS20120809


Israel Beefs Up Military Readiness
By John Glaser, Antiwar.com [August 11, 2012]
---- Israel’s Defense Force is said to be beefing up its defensive capacities and preparing for the possibility of an armed conflict on several fronts, just days after top Israeli officials got in another diplomatic clash on how imminent a threat Iran presents. The military is “dispersing rations, munitions and strategic supplies among facilities nationwide in order to protect them during wartime,” reports the Israeli Ynet News. While these could be somewhat ordinary military preparations in what is a hyper-militarized state, some have interpreted these actions as preparations for possible retaliatory strikes from Iran or its allies following some potential Israeli attack on Iran. http://news.antiwar.com/2012/08/11/israel-beefs-up-military-readiness/
WASHINGTON -- In the run-up to the war in Iraq, neoconservative hawks in and out of the Bush administration promised that the U.S. invasion would quickly transform that country into a strong ally, a model Arab democracy and a major oil producer that would lower world prices, even while paying for its own reconstruction.

"A new regime in Iraq would serve as a dramatic and inspiring example of freedom for other nations in the region," President George W. Bush told a crowd at the American Enterprise Institute in 2003, a few weeks before he launched the attack.

Ten bloody and grueling years later, Iraq is finally emerging from its ruins and establishing itself as a geopolitical player in the Middle East -- but not the way the neocons envisioned.

Though technically a democracy, Iraq's floundering government has degenerated into a tottering quasi-dictatorship. The costs of the war (more than $800 billion) and reconstruction (more than $50 billion) have been staggeringly high. And while Iraq is finally producing oil at pre-war levels, it is trying its best to drive oil prices as high as possible.

Most disturbing to many American foreign policy experts, however, is Iraq's extremely close relationship with Iran. Today, the country that was formerly Iran's deadliest rival is its strongest ally.

"These are the wonderful consequences of our intervention -- and the brilliance of it really is mindboggling," said Chas Freeman, a Middle East scholar and critic of the neoconservatives.

"The extent to which Iraq has become an active collaborator with Iran ... is really very striking."

The U.S. is leading an intense international effort to pressure Iran to rein in its nuclear program. In January, the European Union agreed to join the U.S. embargo on Iranian oil, which went into effect this month.

Rather than help the U.S. in these endeavors, however, Iraq is doing quite the opposite. Iraq has been critical of the U.S. sanctions against Iran, and some fear it will help its neighbor
avoid the penalty's sting by ferrying goods across their shared border.

Another top Obama administration goal in the Middle East is to push Bashar al-Assad's oppressive regime out of Syria. "For the sake of the Syrian people, the time has come for President Assad to step aside," President Barack Obama said last August.

But again, Iraq is working at cross-purposes to the U.S., decrying efforts to oust Assad and letting Iran use its airspace to ship weapons to Assad's government.

In fact, some Middle East scholars predict the rise of a Shiite Iran-Iraq-Syria axis, which could challenge Saudi Arabia and other Sunni Persian Gulf states for control of the region.

**WANING U.S. INFLUENCE**

Neoconservatives with the Bush administration imagined that post-invasion Iraq would serve as a staging ground for American military power in the region. The U.S. built about a dozen huge air bases, at a cost of around $2.4 billion, complete with long landing strips, massive fortifications and all the comforts of home. They clearly meant to stay.

They also intended to retain U.S. influence. The gargantuan U.S. embassy in Baghdad -- a heavily fortified compound the size of Vatican City -- is by far the largest the world has ever seen, and, at a cost of nearly three quarters of a billion dollars to build, the most expensive.

But even before the end of George Bush's presidency, the Iraqis insisted on setting a deadline for the departure of U.S. troops. And when Obama met that deadline in late 2011, the Department of Defense also had to turn over to the Iraqis all of those elaborate military bases.

The State Department has finally acknowledged that it needs to downsize its diplomatic presence in Iraq. Brett McGurk -- whose nomination to be the next U.S. ambassador to Baghdad was derailed by the release of some racy emails -- spoke bluntly in his confirmation hearing in June.

"Quite frankly, our presence in Iraq right now is too large," he said. "There's no proportionality also between our size and our influence. In fact, we spend a lot of diplomatic capital simply to sustain our presence."

The primary beneficiary of this colossal loss of U.S. influence in Iraq has been Iran.

The two countries share a long and sometimes tortured history. Their strongest bond comes
from populations that are largely members of the Shia branch of Islam, rather than the Sunni branch, which is more common in the other Arab countries. The Shia clerics who are so influential in both countries frequently travel back and forth between the two, as well as sharing similar backgrounds and often being related by blood.

But the two countries' ethnic divisions -- Iranians are Persian, while most Iraqis are Arab -- and their fierce nationalism were exploited by Saddam Hussein, a Sunni, who turned Iraq into a bulwark against Iran, even going so far as to launch an eight-year war against Iran in 1980 that cost the lives of as many as a million soldiers.

When the U.S. toppled Saddam and purged his party's loyalists from the government and the military, Iran stepped in, providing support for both the Shia leaders working with the U.S. to form a new government and for the Shia militias that were fighting against the U.S. during its occupation.

Iraq's current president, Nouri al-Maliki, is particularly dependent on Iran because of the political, religious and commercial influence it has exerted in his favor -- most recently in June, when Maliki's ruling coalition nearly fell apart yet again.

To the extent that the internal political struggle in the Middle East is fundamentally between Shiite Iran and Sunni Saudi Arabia, it's clear to the Saudis where the Iraqis' allegiance lies. "He's an Iranian agent," Saudi King Abdullah said of Maliki in a March 2009 conversation with U.S. officials documented in a cable obtained by Wikileaks.

Maliki has "opened the door for Iranian influence in Iraq" since taking power, the king said.

Maliki still has some incentives to keep the relationship with the U.S. from going entirely cold. The State Department is still planning to spend nearly $5 billion in fiscal year 2013 on Iraq, half of it on maintaining its embassy. Iraq will also need the U.S.'s help operating the heavily armed F-16s they recently bought, and it has designs on buying other modern weaponry as well.

But Maliki and other Iraqi leaders "understand that the U.S. will come and the U.S. will go," said Jamsheed Choksy, a professor of Iranian studies at Indiana University.

"People in the region know they can't count on the U.S. in the long term," he said. "If you're a Shia politician, you need Iran."
THE COIN OF THE REALM

Iraqi oil production is **booming**, at long last making it a major world supplier again. All that additional oil on the market is **widely seen** as being a blow to Iran, because it will help fill any shortfall caused by a boycott of Iranian oil.

But short of limiting its own production, Iraq is backing Iran as much as it can in the oil area as well.

Historically, there has been a split in the oil producer group OPEC between price hawks like Venezuela and Algeria, who want to drive the cost of oil as high as possible, and Gulf states like Saudi Arabia, who want to keep prices moderate.

At the **most recent OPEC meeting**, Iraq used its new clout to try to drive the prices up -- siding with Iran against the Saudis. It also backed a **proposal** that OPEC officially protest the new sanctions against Iran.

Both attempts failed, but some observers think Iraq could help Iran defy the sanctions in other ways.

"It remains to be seen whether the U.S. has enough leverage in Iraq to prevent Iraq from serving as a conduit for Iran for oil," Choksy said.

"They could, if they wanted to -- and they would never publicize this -- take Iranian oil across the border in tanker trucks, mix it with Iraqi oil, and send it out into the market as Iraqi oil," said Gary Sick, senior research scholar at Columbia University's Middle East Institute. (Iran recently **did just that** for Syria, when Syria faced an embargo of its oil exports but needed the money.)

Iraq's vast, unpatrolled border with Iran could also be a major conduit for illicit goods, **making other sanctions ineffective**.

FRIENDSHIP HAS ITS LIMITS

As significant as the alliance between Iraq and Iran is, however, it also might not last.

"Iran is far better off today with Iraq than it ever was with Saddam -- there's no comparison; but that doesn't mean that Iraq is a client state and takes its orders from Iran," Sick said.

"You have a government [in Baghdad] whose worldview is generally aligned with that of Tehran," said Michael Eisenstadt, a senior fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East
Policy. But he said Iraqi leaders are adamantly opposed to the sort of clerical rule they see in Iran.

"Iran cannot dictate to Iraq," said Reidar Visser, a research fellow at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs who runs an Iraqi politics website. "Iraqi Shiites still see their interests as being quite distinct from Iranian Shiites."

Sick thinks the Iran-Iraq alliance could fracture over oil, especially if the embargo hurts Iran badly. "Iran's national interest would be to take oil off the market" in order to send prices up and hurt Western economies, Sick said. "But Iraq is really getting ready to play the oil game. I see this as a potential clash of direct national interests."

The neoconservatives, meanwhile, continue to hold out hope. Over at the new headquarters of the Foreign Policy Initiative, executive director Jamie Fly says "it's not clear yet" where Iraq will end up.

"I don't think it's a complete perversion of what was promised," he said. "I think it's probably a mixed bag at this point, in terms of how Iraq has developed as a regional player."

Fly also blamed many of Iraq's failings on the Obama administration's troop pullout. "The problem is that the current administration has dropped the ball, and we've undermined our own ability to help ensure that Iraq stays on a positive trajectory," he said.

"My concern about some of the Iranian influence and the role that Iraq may or may not be playing vis-à-vis Syria is in large part because we don't have a military presence there anymore, and that has weakened our hand and limited our ability to make sure that they don't get drawn further into Tehran's orbit," Fly said.

Predicting what's next in Iraq is next to impossible. In virtually no scenario, however, do things turn out how the neocons intended.

"Whatever [the war] was about, which was never entirely explained, it hasn't worked out terribly well," said Freeman, "and in fact Iraq continues to evolve in ways that are, if not fatal to American interests, certainly negative."

Dan Froomkin is senior Washington correspondent for The Huffington Post. You can send him an email, bookmark his page, subscribe to his RSS feed, follow him on Twitter or on Facebook, and/or become a fan and get email alerts when he writes
Journalism v. Propaganda
By Glenn Greenwald, Salon, 22 July 12, RSN

*The US and Israel blame Iran for the suicide attack in Bulgaria, but offer no evidence for the accusation.*

Almost immediately after a suicide bomber killed five Israeli tourists in Bulgaria on Wednesday, Israeli officials, led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, blamed Iran, an accusation uncritically repeated by most Western media outlets even as Bulgarian investigators warned it would be a "mistake" to assign blame before the attack could be investigated. Now, Israel, along with the U.S., is blaming Hezbollah and, therefore, Iran for the attack. *Today's New York Times article* by Nicholas Kulish and Eric Schmitt - headlined "Hezbollah Is Blamed for Attack on Israeli Tourists in Bulgaria" - uncritically treats those accusations as confirmed fact despite no evidence being offered for it:

American officials on Thursday identified the suicide bomber responsible for a deadly attack on Israeli vacationers here as a member of a Hezbollah cell that was operating in Bulgaria and looking for such targets, corroborating Israel's assertions and making the bombing a new source of tension with Iran.

One senior American official said the current American intelligence assessment was that the bomber, who struck Wednesday, killing five Israelis, had been "acting under broad guidance" to hit Israeli targets when opportunities presented themselves, and that the guidance had been given to Hezbollah, a Lebanese militant group, by Iran, its primary sponsor. Two other American officials confirmed that Hezbollah was behind the bombing, but declined to provide additional details.

The attacks, the official said, were in retaliation for the assassinations of Iranian nuclear scientists, for which Iran has blamed Israeli agents - an accusation that Israel has neither confirmed nor denied. "This was tit for tat," said the American official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because the investigation was still under way. . . .

A senior Israeli official said on Thursday that the Burgas attack was part of an intensive wave of terrorist attacks around the world carried out by two different organizations, the Iranian Quds Force, an elite international operations unit within Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, as well as by Hezbollah.

By "identified," "confirmed" and "corroborated" Iranian and Hezbollah responsibility, what The New
York Times means is this: American officials asserted that this was so, even as they "declined to provide additional details" and even though "the investigation was still under way." Indeed, this accusation is, as the NYT sees it, "confirmed" and "corroborated" even though "no details yet about the bomber like his name or nationality" are known; even though their anonymous American source "declined to describe what specific intelligence - intercepted communications, analysis of the bomber's body parts or other details - led analysts to conclude that the bomber belonged to Hezbollah"; even though "the Bulgarians are still trying to figure out how the bomber entered the country, how he traveled around and where he stayed"; and even though the Bulgarian Foreign Minister said: "We're not pointing the finger in any direction until we know what happened and complete our investigation." All The Paper of Record knows is that U.S. and Israeli officials have blamed Iran and Hezbollah, and - as usual - that's good enough for them. Identified, Confirmed and Corroborated.

By stark contrast, The Washington Post's Karin Brulliard, reporting from Jerusalem, commits an act of actual journalism with her story on this event. She, too, notes the official accusations of Hezbollah and Iranian responsibility, but, as Think Progress' Ali Gharib points out, she heavily qualifies that in the third paragraph of her story: "Israel offered no concrete evidence tying the bombing to Iran, and Bulgarian officials cautioned that it was too early to attribute responsibility." That's called basic journalism: instead of just repeating official claims, treating them as "confirmed," and shaping the entire article around those assertions, she prominently notes that there is no real evidence to lead anyone to believe these accusations. She then adds more skepticism: "U.S. intelligence officials said it was 'plausible' that Hezbollah carried out the attack but that analysts at the CIA and other agencies were still evaluating the intelligence surrounding the bombing and had not reached a conclusion."

I have no idea who is behind the attacks. If it turns out to be Hezbollah and/or Iran, that will not shock me: after all, if it is perceived that you have sent hit squads onto a country's soil to murder their nuclear scientists, it's likely that the targeted nation will want to respond with violence of their own. But there is no evidence to confirm the American and Israeli accusations. A reader of the New York Times article would not know that, while a reader of Brulliard's article in the Post would. That's the difference between journalism and propagandistic stenography. It's really not that difficult or complex, when repeating government claims, to note clearly and prominently that no evidence has been furnished to support those claims.

Following up on the argument I made about the Syria bombing - that Western political and media circles would treat the attack on Syrian officials as something to praise: the U.S. State Department, even when assuming it was a suicide bomb, refused to denounce the attack and came close to praising it, while The New York Times referred to the rebels' "brazen assassination of top security officials." While denying responsibility for the Bulgarian attack, Iranian officials noted this posture:

The speaker of Iran's Parliament, Ali Larijani, criticized the United States for not condemning the bombing in Damascus on Wednesday that struck at President Bashar al-Assad's inner circle, killing three senior defense officials. "By not condemning the assassination in Syria, the Americans show that they believe in good assassinations and bad assassinations," he said, according to the Fars news agency.

Indeed, in one of the grandest understatements of the year, State Department spokesperson Victoria
Nuland, when asked about U.S. policy toward Israeli human rights abuses, recently acknowledged: "We are not always consistent." That's true even when it comes to the question of what counts as Terrorism and

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