End the War Threats and Sanctions Program Against Iran; Support the Struggle for Democracy Inside Iran

written by Campaign for Peace and Democracy | January 26, 2011

We, the undersigned, oppose the U.S.-led campaign to impose harsher sanctions on Iran, and the ongoing threat of war against that country. Despite Washington's claims, its policy is clearly not animated by a genuine concern for protecting the world from the threat of nuclear war; otherwise how could Washington support such nuclear-armed states as India, Israel, and Pakistan, or maintain its own huge nuclear arsenal? Nor is U.S. policy driven by the goal of defending democracy. If it were, how could the United States support brutally authoritarian regimes such as those in Saudi Arabia and Egypt?

Months after it began its recent program to sanction Iran for its nuclear activities, the United States, in a move described by *The New York Times* as "more symbolic than substantive," froze the foreign assets and denied visas to eight Iranian officials, citing their role in the post-elections crackdown. This symbolic gesture cannot obscure the fact that Washington's fundamental motivation for imposing the comprehensive sanctions aimed at Iran's nuclear program is to neutralize or eliminate a major threat to its power in the region.

In June 2009 people around the world were inspired by the courageous protests in Iran, when hundreds of thousands, possibly millions, took to the streets to demand their democratic rights. Since then the Iranian government has tried to repress the movement: hundreds of political prisoners remain behind bars, often tortured, deprived of medical care, and forced to live under dangerously unhealthy conditions. We support those who struggle for democracy and social justice inside Iran.

Far from helping the Iranian people, sanctions and war threats strengthen Ahmadinejad's regime, helping it to shift the blame for worsening economic conditions from itself entirely onto the external enemy. In the past the Iranian elite has proven able to circumvent sanctions, but if Washington actually succeeds in preventing Tehran from importing refined petroleum, exporting oil and other items, and conducting normal trade and banking activities, over time millions of ordinary Iranians will suffer.

We don't want Iran, or any other country, including our own, to have nuclear weapons. But even the U.S. government admits that Iran does not now possess nuclear weapons and has no imminent prospect of acquiring them. Moreover, Iran has no less right than any other nation to develop civilian nuclear power. Many of us oppose the use of nuclear energy by any country, both for environmental reasons and because of its link to nuclear weapons — but that is not the issue in the present U.S.-Iran confrontation. The United States, a major producer of nuclear energy and by far the leading nuclear weapons nation, which continually upgrades its own conventional and nuclear arsenal and tolerates the possession of nuclear weapons by other reckless and aggressive powers, has no moral legitimacy when it tries to punish Iran for its nuclear activities.

U.S. belligerence — its continual warnings that "all options remain on the table," possibly including acceptance of an Israeli attack — only creates strong inducements for Tehran to seek nuclear weapons for its defense, or to become, like Japan, "nuclear-weapons capable," i.e.

possessing all the elements necessary to make a bomb without actually manufacturing one. And it's not just Iran: U.S. militarism has helped to create a Hobbesian world in which more and more countries come to believe that their survival depends on nuclear "deterrence."

The United States can best reduce the danger of nuclear war by taking major steps to divest *itself* of nuclear weapons as part of a new, democratic and socially just foreign policy. This would include initiating both nuclear and conventional disarmament, encompassing missile "defense" as well as more obviously offensive weaponry; ending its predatory wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan; supporting a Nuclear-Free Weapons Zone in the Middle East; giving real support to Palestinian rights rather than continuing one-sided support to Israel; and dismantling its more than 1,000 military bases around the world. Such steps would help undermine the rationale for Iran and other countries developing their own nuclear weapons. These actions would also be the most effective way to strengthen women's, labor, and other democratic movements in the Middle East, and to promote the interests of ordinary Americans and real peace in the world.

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Footnotes