

**'It's Your Fault': U.S. Gets the  
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# 'It's Your Fault': U.S. Gets the Israel Treatment Over Iran Iran makes threats, the U.S. gets blamed for "saber-rattling."

by Shoshana Bryen

Israel is often in this position. Its enemies threaten it in unacceptable ways or commit acts of violence just under some unspoken-but-very-real threshold of tolerance (not Israel's threshold, mind you, but that of the U.S., the UN or the EU). Corresponding Israeli action to protect its people is called "aggression" and Israel is blamed for any resulting damage. In 2002, Israel's choice was to suffer suicide bombers or to enter Palestinian cities on the West Bank. In 2005, it was to accept terrorist infiltration or to build the security fence. In 2008 and 2009, it was to permit Hamas to rain rockets and missiles on the south, or to enter Gaza to restore its deterrence. In 2010, the choice was to intercept the Mavi Marmara in international waters or to risk having it blow up on Israel's shores.

In each case, Israel suffered the opprobrium of the uninvolved. Rarely was it noted that if Israel's enemies would just stop trying to kill them, there wouldn't be a need for any of those choices.

The U.S. now finds itself in a similar situation, but the belief that America will be at fault if it antagonizes Iran comes at least in part from Americans.

Iran has been pursuing nuclear technology since the days of the shah, but with more overt apocalyptic overtones under the Islamic Republic. While the threat of military action against Iranian facilities is a penumbra around the conversation, the U.S., Europe, and even Israel are first committed to a plan of diplomacy and sanctions to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

But Iran *wants* nuclear weapons — or at least wants to pursue whatever nuclear capability it wants to pursue without full disclosure and without penalty.

To break the impasse, the U.S. and the West have struggled with the organized evolution of non-military pressure (increased banking sanctions and the decision of the EU to phase in a boycott of Iranian oil). Iran's response has been to threaten military action to close the Strait of Hormuz, the egress for about 60% of the world's oil. Ali Akbar Velayati, an adviser to Iran's supreme leader, said on Iranian television: "Iran will never allow itself to be in a situation in which it cannot sell oil but other regional states can."

What to do? Well, if you are the chattering classes in Washington, [blame the United States for "saber rattling," "ratcheting up" the tension, and possibly provoking the military activity](#) Iran has announced itself prepared to execute.

Last week, the Atlantic Council gathered representatives of a variety of other think tanks, all heavily populated with former State Department and CIA analysts, to discuss the increased tension in the Persian Gulf. They concluded that President Obama's statement that he "will take no option off the table" and the dispatch of an American aircraft carrier (along with British and French ships) through the Strait of Hormuz have put us in "a fraught and dangerous situation," per Bruce Riedel, a former CIA official now with the Brookings Institution.

"We've added a military dimension to our policy... and to efforts to ratchet up the pressure... which didn't exist before," opined Michael Eisenstadt of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. "This is the most scared I have been about the potential for military action between the U.S. and Iran since I started following country," added the Atlantic Council's Barbara Slavin.

No, it's not all America's fault; the Iranians are partly responsible.

Riedel denounced "saber rattling from Tehran to South Carolina," but the Republican presidential candidates concerned him perhaps more than Mr. Velyati. "If you've watched the debates so far this year, you've seen a lot of saber rattling," he said. Rejecting the possibility that a military strike against Iran might have its intended effect, Riedel predicted that the U.S. and Israel would be called aggressors, and didn't disagree with the characterization. "We will have initiated a military action and we will have started a war. We have drifted so easily into war twice in the last decade. Let's not make that mistake again."

Israel was a dog on a short leash for Eisenstadt: "2012 is likely the year of decision for Israel on this issue. ... From their point of view, they look at this and say that time may no longer be working in their favor, and they may be reaching a point in which deferring military action means forgoing military action altogether."

After years of haggling and struggling, the United States, Western Europe, and their allies including Japan and others have finally come close to organizing serious sanctions against the regime in Tehran. It may be "too little, too late," but if the Iranians would just abandon their secret nuclear programs and stop threatening Israel and the rest of the world, the sanctions backed by "all options" wouldn't be necessary.

If they won't, they — not we — are responsible for any ensuing "ratcheting."