



## Defusing the Middle East Would Lower Gas Prices

Tension in the Middle East tends to push prices up, because the threat of war puts this major oil region under a darkening cloud of uncertainty. With Iran the tension is even greater because it is located on the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow waterway between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, 21 nautical miles at its narrowest point. Roughly 20 percent of the world's oil moves through the strait, which is key for getting oil from the gulf countries to the rest of the world.



Iran has threatened to mine or close the strait in retaliation for an attack by Israel or the United States. The danger to oil tankers traversing the strait would shoot insurance prices through the roof, and the price of oil would follow as the supply diminished.

Since American and Israeli war talk directed at Iran is undoubtedly responsible for much of the recent price rise, it stands to reason that ceasing that talk convincingly would take the pressure off and would allow prices to fall again.

So why aren't the Republicans calling on Obama to extend an olive branch to Iran? The answer is simple: Republicans (excepting Ron Paul) place American imperial bullying ahead of everything else. They may talk about the virtue of free markets and private property, but clearly their priority is American hegemony, no matter the cost in taxpayer money and freedom.

They would rather risk crippling high gasoline and oil prices — not to mention crippling American military personnel and Iranian children — than pass up an opportunity to rattle their sabers in defense



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of the American empire and to show how fierce these chicken hawks are. (Mitt Romney, Rick Santorum, and Newt Gingrich spent no time in the military, much less in a war zone. Such politicians are often the most eager to send men and women to war.)

To hear them tell it, the very existence of the United States and Israel is at stake in the confrontation with Iran over its alleged nuclear-weapons program. Nonsense. American and Israeli intelligence say that the Iranian government has not decided to build a nuclear weapon. Every pound of uranium in Iran's possession is under an International Atomic Energy Agency seal. Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, issued a fatwa against nuclear weapons years ago, and repeated this prohibition as recently as February. Furthermore, no American or Israeli official seriously believes that Iran would use a nuclear warhead to attack, even if it did build one. Why not? A nuclear strike on Israel or the United States would summon a devastating second strike that would destroy Iran and its government — and no one believes the Iranian regime is suicidal. Israel's defense minister, Ehud Barak, himself says survival is the regime's top priority.

So why the loose war talk? Why does Obama menace Iran without provocation by declaring that "all options are on the table," including "all elements of American power" (emphasis added)? Why has he imposed harsh economic sanctions, which inflict pain on the Iranian people and which constitute an act of war under international law?

The reason is that America's top politicians, Republican and Democrat, are locked into the imperial mindset. In their view, this country — more precisely, the man who



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presides over the national government — is the policeman of the world. They embrace President George H.W. Bush’s decree from 1990: “What we say goes.” If the president doesn’t like something, he reserves the authority to do something about it — militarily if “necessary.”

So they are willing to go to war, or to risk it in a deadly game of chicken, regardless of the cost in human life or economic growth.

More expensive gasoline for the rest of us is a small price to pay for their imperial ambitions.

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