

COUNTERPUNCH

Why We Only Hear Diaspora Voice Who Want War

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In coverage of the war against Iran, a familiar choreography is playing out again, one that the media have carefully refined to exploit the perceived credibility of diaspora groups in order to push war and empire. This phenomenon of selectively and specifically amplifying diaspora voices who will cheerlead for war is now a well-documented feature of the American media ecosystem. For months in the lead up to this new illegal and unconstitutional war, high-profile American “news” outlets featured almost exclusively Iranians and Iranian-Americans who argued for regime change through ground invasion, a position arguably even more extreme and reckless than that of Donald Trump.

Major outlets host sympathetic figures with very good reasons to hate the target country and unassailable arguments that its rulers are authoritarian criminals. The Iranian-American social scientist [Kian Tajbakhsh](#) falls within this group. A former political prisoner of the Iranian

government who was released as part of Barack Obama's nuclear deal, Tajbakhsh recently appeared on CNN to help make the case for the war from his unique and apparently unassailable position. With respect to Tajbakhsh, having been a political prisoner allows one to make laughably ridiculous statements that others cannot. After insulting the Iranian people by saying that they are too weak to change the fate of their own country unless some major power like the United States helps them, he shifted to insulting the intelligence of the audience by saying that Israel and the U.S. had not started the war: "I don't think it's right to say that President Trump has started a war with Iran. I think President Trump wants to finish a war that Iran started in 1979, 47 years ago."

To begin with, neither of these statements are true. Tajbakhsh conveniently left out the fact that the United States already conducted illegal regime change in 1953, when Washington made a brutal dictator of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi after overthrowing an elected leader, prime minister Mohammad Mosaddegh. Further, it is the responsibility of the Iranian people to rid themselves of the criminal regime in Tehran—or indeed it is no one's responsibility. It is certainly not the responsibility or, more importantly, *the right* of the United States to do so. International law still exists. The Constitution of the United States still exists. Tajbakhsh's thin reasoning would function as a *carte blanche* for the United States to start wars of choice and choose foreign governments, and in fact these kinds of arguments have operated in precisely this way for generations of imperialists in Washington. Because all governments the world over violate the human rights of their subjects, there is no cognizable upper limit on this kind of reason, no discernible reason why the American government shouldn't, as Joe Biden put it, run the entire world.

The point is not to pick on Tajbakhsh; he is one among many. For months, the American media has pushed just these kinds of absurd "arguments" for another aggressive and illegal war, none of which care to address the requirements of international or domestic legal standards. American audiences frequently get similar pro-war messaging from the Iranian-American writer Masih Alinejad. Just days ago, after Israel and the U.S. began the war, Alinejad went on Jake Tapper's show to scold opponents of war for being "allergic to regime change," invoking the Berlin Wall, as she frequently does in her appearances. Like Tajbakhsh, she has been targeted by the Iranian government and uses a dramatic and personal story to occlude the much larger issues and stakes, and to manipulate unsophisticated American audiences who honestly want freedom for the Iranian people. This whole strategy is only possible due to how little Americans know about the rest of the world.

Reza Pahlavi, the son of ousted Iranian dictator Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, is also a frequent guest of the American broadcast media. Pahlavi also has a personal interest in the United States waging war and conducting regime change in Iran, as he has for years hoped to return to Tehran as a kind of king (he insists that he would be merely a transitional leader). It should be shocking to us to watch the U.S. media repeatedly elevate the voices of figures like Reza Pahlavi, the so-

called Crown Prince whom Iranians rightly associate with Western interference in the country and its sovereign interests. We should appreciate that to the media companies that invite them on, *the whole job* of people like Tajbakhsh, Alinejad, and Pahlavi is to convince Americans, who are largely totally ignorant of Iran and the political situation therein, that another war of choice is not only permissible, but is the correct and morally required path. The “journalists” who promote these views uncritically are committing malpractice and in effect lying to their audiences.

It’s important for Americans to understand that such individuals represent an extremely small minority of the groups for which they claim to speak, and they are chosen to speak specifically because they support American war-making. A consistent majority of Iranians living in both the U.S. and Iran oppose American military action against Iran, even if they oppose the country’s current government. They understand that the costs of war are borne by innocent people, and that aggressive war against the regime is likely to strengthen hard-liners—and unlikely to do anything but convince Iranian elites that the only way forward is to arm themselves with a nuclear weapon. (In recent days, some commentators have recalled reports that U.S. attacks on Libya and the killing of Muammar Gaddafi influenced North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un’s decision to hold onto nuclear weapons for dear life.

The American media have done their best to silence and sideline the anti-war majority. A [statement from the National Iranian American Council](#) on February 6, before the U.S. and Israel began their war, put it plainly, “As the pressure campaign for the U.S. to bomb Iran mounts, efforts to silence anti-war voices like NIAC are intensifying.” The NIAC statement is consistent with the views of both the majority of the Iranian diaspora and the majority of Americans: “The Iranian hardliners hate that we consistently condemn human rights violations in Iran. The American hardliners hate that we consistently oppose war on Iran. And both hate us because we have been vocal advocates for U.S.-Iran diplomacy rather than confrontation.” Normal people overwhelmingly want to see diplomacy between governments because they understand that wars are paid for in their blood and that of their friends and neighbors; they also understand that most people anywhere in the world are just struggling to survive and provide for themselves and their families. Throughout history, the pro-war position has always been a minority position that serves the interests of a tiny elite, and the U.S. government (like all modern states) has always been an undemocratic and minoritarian one.

Here, too, parallels to the Iraq war are remarkable and deeply disturbing. Many will recall the parade of Iraqi ex-pats making the case for war and convincing American audiences that the United States military would be welcomed as liberators. Ahmed Chalabi was elevated as an authoritative figure on the situation in Iraq, despite the serious misgivings of many American intelligence veterans. We see all of these dynamics again and again, now in the public conversation about Cuba, in which a small but vocal and influential Cuban-Americans push for regime change on our televisions every day.

Because the U.S. government is not a democracy and isn't anything like one, this kind of propaganda by cherry-picking is not actually necessary. The president doesn't even need Congress to go to war, much less the popular masses of Americans. But the ruling class and its increasingly concentrated media conglomerates do certainly want us to share their views, and ultimately they expect us to. The only form of civic duty we as Americans seem to recognize these days is the acceptance and sharing of views given to us by a corrupt and imperialist state and giant entertainment companies. This situation should be unacceptable to a people who call ourselves free, but we can't see it, much less analyze or comment on it.

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