

What Does Biden's 'Deliberate Ambiguity' on Iran Sanctions Imply?

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Global Research, October 12, 2020

Region: [Middle East & North Africa, USA](#)

Theme: [Intelligence, US NATO War Agenda](#)

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The Trump administration tightened the noose further around Iran's beleaguered economy on Thursday, October 8, announcing a fresh round of sanctions that will effectively shut the country out of the global financial system.

The Trump administration has imposed sanctions on eighteen major Iranian banks in one of the most extensive such moves by Washington against Tehran in months. The order will also penalize non-Iranian institutions trading with them, effectively cutting the banks off from the international financial system.

Significantly, the sanctions also target foreign companies that do business with the banks, giving them 45 days to cease such activities or face "third-party sanctions."

"The United States expects all U.N. member states to fully comply with their obligations to implement these measures," Mike Pompeo announced in September. "If UN member states fail to fulfill their obligations to implement these sanctions, the United States is prepared to use our domestic authorities to impose consequences for those failures and ensure that Iran does not reap the benefits of UN-prohibited activity."

It's noteworthy that the Iran sanctions that were lifted in 2015 after the signing of JCPOA were "third-party sanctions," implying that any state or business organization doing business with Iran wouldn't be able to engage in commercial activities with the US government and commercial enterprises based in the US.

Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden has kept his statements deliberately ambiguous in order to fill the gaps in his Iran policy. On the one hand, he made an electoral promise to consider restoring the Iran nuclear deal if elected, but on the other, he tweeted in June last year: "Make no mistake: Iran continues to be a bad actor that abuses human rights and supports terrorist activities throughout the region."

"What we need is presidential leadership that will take strategic action to counter the Iranian threat, restore America's standing in the world, recognize the value of principled diplomacy, and strengthen our nation and our security by working strategically with our allies."

Nevertheless, even if we assume Biden is sincere in restoring the nuclear pact, considering the influence of Zionist lobbies in Washington, that forced Trump to abandon the deal in May 2018, Biden would find it impossible to follow through on his bombastic electoral

rhetoric with tangible policy decisions.

Donald Trump has repeatedly said in the run-up to the 2016 US presidential elections and during the four years of his presidency that the Iran nuclear deal, signed by the Obama administration in 2015, was an “unfair deal” that gave concessions to Iran without giving anything in return to the US.

Unfortunately, there is a grain of truth in Trump’s statements because the Obama administration signed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with Iran in July 2015 under pressure, as Washington had bungled in its Middle East policy and it wanted Iran’s cooperation in Syria and Iraq to get a face-saving.

In order to understand how the Obama administration bungled in Syria and Iraq, we should bear the background of Washington’s Middle East policy during the recent years in mind. The nine-year conflict in Syria that gave birth to myriads of militant groups, including the Islamic State, and after the conflict spilled across the border into neighboring Iraq in early 2014 was directly responsible for the spate of Islamic State-inspired terror attacks in Europe from 2015 to 2017.

Since the beginning of the Syrian conflict in August 2011 to June 2014, when the Islamic State overran Mosul and Anbar in Iraq, an informal pact existed between the Western powers, their regional allies and jihadists of the Middle East against the Iranian resistance axis. In accordance with the pact, militants were trained and armed in the training camps located in the border regions of Turkey and Jordan to battle the Syrian government.

This arrangement of an informal pact between the Western powers and the jihadists of the Middle East against the Iran-allied forces worked well up to August 2014, when the Obama Administration made a volte-face on its previous regime change policy in Syria and began conducting air strikes against one group of militants battling the Syrian government, the Islamic State, after the latter overstepped its mandate in Syria and overran Mosul and Anbar in Iraq from where the US had withdrawn its troops only a couple of years ago in December 2011.

After this reversal of policy in Syria by the Western powers and the subsequent Russian military intervention on the side of the Syrian government in September 2015, the momentum of jihadists’ expansion in Syria and Iraq stalled, and they felt that their Western patrons had committed a treachery against the jihadists’ cause, hence they were infuriated and rose up in arms to exact revenge for this betrayal.

If we look at the chain of events, the timing of the spate of terror attacks against the West was critical: the Islamic State overran Mosul in June 2014, the Obama Administration began conducting air strikes against the Islamic State’s targets in Iraq and Syria in August 2014, and after a lull of almost a decade since the horrific Madrid and London bombings in 2004 and 2005, respectively, the first such incident of terrorism occurred on the Western soil at the offices of Charlie Hebdo in January 2015.

Then the Islamic State carried out the audacious November 2015 Paris attacks, the March 2016 Brussels bombings, the June 2016 truck-ramming incident in Nice, and three horrific terror attacks took place in the United Kingdom within a span of less than three months in 2017, and after that the Islamic State carried out the Barcelona attack in August 2017, and then another truck-ramming atrocity occurred in Lower Manhattan in October 2017 that was

also claimed by the Islamic State.

Keeping this background of the quagmire created by the Obama administration in Syria and Iraq in mind, it becomes amply clear that the Obama administration desperately needed Iran's cooperation in Syria and Iraq to salvage its botched policy of training and arming jihadists to topple the government Bashar al-Assad in Syria that backfired and gave birth to the Islamic State that carried out some of the most audacious terror attacks in Europe from 2015 to 2017.

Thus, Washington signed JCPOA in July 2015 that gave some concessions to Iran, and in return, former hardliner Prime Minister of Iraq Nouri al-Maliki was forced out of power in September 2014 with Iran's tacit approval and moderate former Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi was appointed in his stead who gave permission to the US Air Force and ground troops to assist the Iraqi Armed Forces and allied militias to beat back the Islamic State from Mosul and Anbar.

The Iran nuclear deal, however, was neither an international treaty under the American laws nor even an executive agreement. It was simply categorized as a "political commitment." Due to the influence of Zionist lobbies in Washington, the opposition to the JCPOA in the American political discourse was so vehement that forget about having it passed through the US Congress, the task the Obama administration faced was to muster enough votes of dissident Democrats to defeat a resolution of disapproval so that it couldn't override a presidential veto.

The Trump administration, however, was not hampered by the legacy of Obama administration and since the objective of defeating the Islamic State had already been achieved in October 2017, therefore Washington felt safe to unilaterally annul the Iran nuclear deal in May 2018 at Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's behest, and the crippling "third-party sanctions" have once again been put in place on Iran's oil and financial sectors.

Another impediment to restoring the Iran nuclear deal is its ballistic missile technology. If Biden is to restore the Iran nuclear deal after being elected president, he would have to renegotiate the pact to also include Iran's ballistic missile program alongside its nuclear program, which Tehran regards as a "strategic deterrence" against its regional foes and hence off the table.

Washington's principal objective in Syria's proxy war was ensuring Israel's regional security. The United States Defense Intelligence Agency's [declassified report](#) [1] of 2012 clearly spelled out the imminent rise of a Salafist principality in northeastern Syria - in Raqqa and Deir al-Zor which were occupied by the Islamic State until October 2017 - in the event of an outbreak of a civil war in Syria.

Under pressure from the Zionist lobbies in Washington, however, the Obama administration deliberately suppressed the report and also overlooked the view in general that a proxy war in Syria would give birth to radical Islamic jihadists.

The hawks in Washington were fully aware of the consequences of their actions in Syria, but they kept pursuing the ill-fated policy of nurturing militants in the training camps located in Syria's border regions with Turkey and Jordan in order to weaken the anti-Zionist Bashar al-Assad government.

The single biggest threat to Israel's regional security was posed by the Iranian resistance axis, which is comprised of Iran, Syria and their Lebanon-based surrogate, Hezbollah. During the course of 2006 Lebanon War, Hezbollah fired hundreds of rockets into northern Israel and Israel's defense community realized for the first time the nature of threat that Hezbollah posed to Israel's regional security.

Those were only unguided rockets but it was a wakeup call for Israel's military strategists that what would happen if Iran passed the guided missile technology to Hezbollah whose area of operations lies very close to the northern borders of Israel.

Therefore, the Zionist lobbies in Washington persuaded the Obama administration, of which Biden was the vice president, to orchestrate a proxy war against Damascus and its Lebanon-based surrogate Hezbollah in order to dismantle the Iranian resistance axis against Israel.

Over the years, Israel has not only provided medical aid and material support to the militant groups battling Damascus – particularly to various factions of the Free Syria Army (FSA) and al-Qaeda's Syrian affiliate al-Nusra Front in Daraa and Quneitra bordering the Israel-occupied Golan Heights – but Israel's air force has virtually played the role of the air force of Syrian militants and conducted hundreds of airstrikes in Syria during the nine-year conflict.

In an [interview to New York Times](#) [2] in January last year, Israel's outgoing Chief of Staff Lt. General Gadi Eisenkot confessed that the Netanyahu government approved his recommendations in January 2017 to step up airstrikes in Syria. Consequently, more than 200 Israeli airstrikes were launched against the Syrian targets in 2017 and 2018, as [revealed](#) [3] by the Israeli Intelligence Minister Israel Katz in September 2018.

In 2018 alone, Israel's air force dropped 2,000 bombs in Syria. The purpose of Israeli airstrikes in Syria has been to degrade Iran's guided missile technology provided to Damascus and its Lebanon-based proxy, Hezbollah, which poses an existential threat to Israel's regional security.

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Notes

[1] The United States Defense Intelligence Agency's declassified report of 2012:

<http://levantreport.com/2015/05/19/2012-defense-intelligence-agency-document-west-will-facilitate-rise-of-islamic-state-in-order-to-isolate-the-syrian-regime/>

[2] An interview with Lt. Gen. Gadi Eisenkot, Israel's chief of staff:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/11/opinion/gadi-eisenkot-israel-iran-syria.html>

[3] Israel Katz: Israel conducted 200 airstrikes in Syria in 2017 and 2018:

<https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/benjamin-netanyahu-admits-israel-to-blame-for-damascus-strikes-1.812590>

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[The Globalization of War: America's "Long War" against Humanity](#)

Michel Chossudovsky

The "globalization of war" is a hegemonic project. Major military and covert intelligence operations are being undertaken simultaneously in the Middle East, Eastern Europe, sub-Saharan Africa, Central Asia and the Far East. The U.S. military agenda combines both major theater operations as well as covert actions geared towards destabilizing sovereign states.

ISBN Number: 978-0-9737147-6-0

Year: 2015

Pages: 240 Pages

List Price: \$22.95

Special Price: \$15.00

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