

Trump and “America Last” Policy in the Middle East

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Global Research, April 14, 2019

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)
Theme: [History](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

Brian Hook, the United States Special Representative for Iran, in an [Opinion](#) published in the New York Times, raises the question that: “Isn’t it time to abandon the policies that have kept the people of Iran and the United States apart since 1979?” In this paper, he tries to rationalize and legitimize Trump’s irrational and illegitimate policies against Iran, such as withdrawal from JCPOA, imposing maximum pressures and sanctions against Iranian people, and even preventing their access to humanitarian aids- contrary to the US international commitments- when many people are suffering from the most devastating flood in recent history.

Developing a fabricated narrative and expecting everyone to believe it, not only doesn’t contribute to understanding the problem but also is misleading for those who have constructed it and naturally leads to self-deception and costly mistakes in foreign policy. That’s exactly what has happened in the US foreign policy toward the Middle East during the past four decades and the Trump administration is prolonging it another decade.

Image on the right: Mohammad Mosaddegh in court, 8 November 1953 (Source: Wikimedia Commons)



Both Iran and the US should abandon the policies that have kept the people of Iran and the US apart. However, Iran-US problems did not begin in 1979 but with the 1953 military coup against the democratic government of Mohammad Mossadeq. Before that, Iranians had a positive image of the US since the constitutional revolution in Iran (1905-11).

If the military coup had not happened, there would not have been a revolution in 1979. Even, Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of the Iranian revolution was emphasizing on reform not a revolution for a long time. It was the US support for a corrupted and inefficient

dictatorship that made the revolution inevitable.

In the Middle East, we have been experiencing lose-lose conflicts for decades. The Iraqi war (1980-88) [Iran-Iraq] supported by Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the US, imposed 200,000 casualties, 700,000 injured, and one trillion dollars of costs on Iran. Two years later, Saddam attacked its main supporters, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia.

To get rid of their self-created threat, Saudis invited the US to expel Iraqi forces from Kuwait in 1990 and since then the US has been constantly engaged in the Middle East conflicts. Israel intensified their efforts against Iran mostly after the collapse of the Soviet Union and Iraqi defeat, since the early 1990s, with dual containment and ILSA sanctions. They were concerned with losing their strategic importance in Washington and tried to construct a new “common enemy”.

During the 1990s the US followed Saudi Arabia in Afghanistan to contain Iran through Taliban. That approach led to 30 years of instabilities in Afghanistan, creating a safe-haven for Al-Qaeda and finally the September 11 terrorist attacks that killed three thousand innocent people in New York. In 2003 Netanyahu played a key role in convincing the US to invade Iraq, while the US was already engaged in the Iraqi quagmire for a decade following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. The Iraqi war cost the American people 36,000 casualties plus 7 trillion dollars economically.

In the Middle East context, the US has mostly suffered from its “allies and friends”, not “enemies”. Following Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Israel from Afghanistan to Iraq, Syria, and Yemen have imposed more than 58000 casualties, 7 trillion dollars of costs on the US and much more on the Middle East. Saudi and Israeli Lobbyists are paid to “enlighten” Washington about the region. If the US has received 50 billion dollars of yearly net profits for following the Saudi and Israeli approach during the past 50 years, it does not reach to half of the total costs that the US “friends” have imposed on the country. This is the root cause of problems in the region that has undermined the US’ global position and influence in all parts of the world from East Asia to South America.

US foreign policy toward the Middle East has been “America last” for decades. Trump promised to “drain the swamp” but it seems that the “swamp” has drained the rationality of the Trump Administration. The decision to enlist IRGC as a terrorist organization is a clear example of irrationality. In recent years, IRGC played a key role in fighting with ISS and other terrorist groups and without IRGC and its allies, ISS had invaded from Baghdad to Beirut. Only a limited number of people like Netanyahu and Saudis welcomed the US designation of IRGC because they are behind all anti-Iran decisions in Washington. When it comes to the US policy-making toward the Middle East, the US has not been able to decide based on America interests.

Iran has a dynamic society and has been able to resist the US threats, sanctions, and pressures for four decades. It is much stronger and developed now than in 1979. Iran soft power stems from its belief system, culture, inclusive institutions, rationality, national solidarity, and stability. These soft elements plus Iran hard power such as endogenous military and security capabilities, economic resilience, strong infrastructure, 15 million young people with higher education, scientific achievements, strategic location, regional markets, natural resources, etc. will help Iran to defend itself during the next decade.

The US officials have wrongly been convinced that dictatorship brings stability in the Middle East, that's why we see them behind all military governments and despotic monarchies. Inefficient dictatorships are the root cause of regional instabilities in the Middle East. In 2009, two years before the Arab spring, Human Development Report described the situation in the Arab world with "inefficacy, unemployment, low-quality education, ethnic conflicts, the growth of population, corruption, lack of political freedom and military governments". These challenges plus foreign military and political interventions led to a decade of instabilities and conflicts.

Now in 2019, the situation in the Middle East and North Africa is much worse than in 2009. The region faces with "low-quality governance, stagnant economies, deteriorating education and health services, high unemployment rate, water shortages, food insecurity, and rampant corruption". The most stable countries in the region are those with levels of political participation and democracy such as Iran and Turkey. As Trump said, some of the wealthy Arab government's wouldn't "[last a week](#)" without US protection. That's why they hugely invest in public relation companies in Washington to pay the costs of their making with American blood, money, and military.

During the past 40 years, Iran has behaved responsibly and contributed to peace in the region. Iran opposed the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union; accepted 2.5 million Afghan refugees; opposed the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait; supported the peace process in Tajikistan; opposed domination of Afghanistan by Taliban (while the US allies recognized the group); played a key role in Bonn conference to bring peace and stability in Afghanistan; contributed to peace and stability of Iraq; proposed inclusive peace plans for Syria and Yemen (rejected by the US allies); supported Iraqi and Syrian forces against ISIS and other terrorist groups; negotiated and implemented JCPOA according to IAEA while the US not only withdrew from that but also puts pressure on other countries to violate an international agreement.

The US has mostly benefited from Iran's regional and international behaviors and stuffed from the policies followed by its "friends".

- By supporting Saddam against Iran;
- creating and supporting Al-Qaida and Taliban; blockading Qatar;
- launching military coups in the region; military intervention in Bahrain and Yemen;
- supporting terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq; purchasing nuclear capable missiles (Saudi Arabia);
- producing nuclear weapons (Israel) and investing in other countries nuclear program... the US "friends" (Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Israel) have imposed huge costs on the US and the Middle East.

The Middle East and North Africa need 60 to 100 million jobs during the next decade and without a regional peaceful context, it would be impossible to create them by any government. It is evident that the current US approach toward Iran and the Middle East, - mainly shaped by Netanyahu, MBS (Mohammed ben Salman) and MbZ (Mohammad bin Zayed)- will lead to more instabilities, failing states, migration, extremism, terrorism, conflicts and costs not only for MENA but also for Europe, the US and the rest of the world.

As a famous Iranian poet, Saadi, says: "a wise *enemy* is much better than a stupid *friend*". If Pompeo and Hook really believe in democracy and human rights, it's better that they

prevent the Khashoggi killer unhook. As far as brains and minds in Washington is occupied by Saudi-UAE-Israeli Lobbies and the US is thoughtlessly following them, it's difficult to imagine any reconciliation between Tehran and Washington under any government the Middle East and North Africa will remain as the least peaceful part of the world.

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