

Trump's Bellicosity Sells Weapons but Also Boosts Iran and the Palestinian Cause

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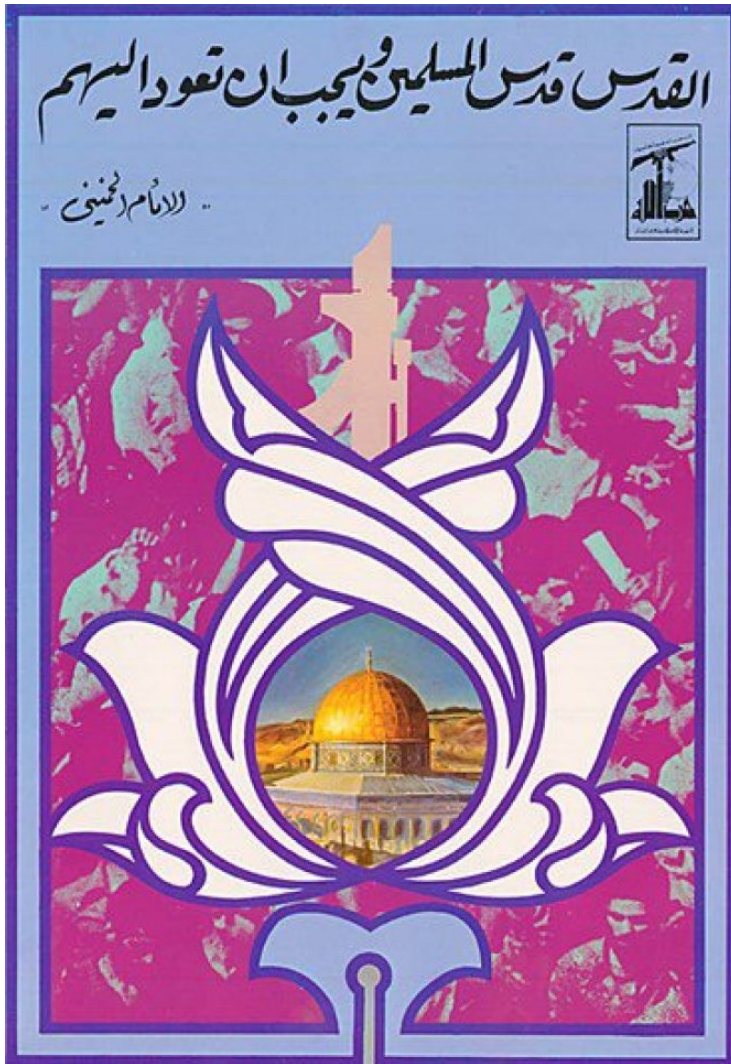
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When the "Islamic State" (ISIS) occupied large territories in Iraq and Syria, it shifted Middle East and world attention to it, moving the focus away from the Palestinian cause. The countries affected by the ISIS horror concentrated on recovering their occupied territories in the Levant and Mesopotamia, eliminating the infrastructure of the terrorist group, and stopping its recruitment of national and foreign fighters. The goal was to freeze the expansion of ISIS and to prevent it from spilling over into other countries in the Middle East.

Many militant members of Palestinian groups such as Hamas took up arms in support of either al-Qaeda or ISIS, mainly in Syria and but also to some extent in Iraq. Between 2012 and 2018 the political leadership of Hamas even supported NATO's war for regime-change in Syria, earning the enmity of President Bashar al-Assad, whose government had defended Hamas and the Palestinian cause for decades. For years Assad resisted US demands to expel Hamas from Syria, and was rewarded with treachery.

But in the last two years President Donald Trump and his team have given a huge boost to the Palestinian cause and restored its lustre despite the betrayals and distractions of the last decade. Today, all those supporting the Palestinian cause are not only united against one enemy (the US-Israeli coalition) but ready to fight as one body on multiple fronts.



Trump's gifts to the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of the Syrian Golan occupied by Israel and of the whole of Israeli-occupied Jerusalem gave an enormous boost of adrenaline to all non-state actors and resistance movements in the Middle East. These groups, who enjoy financial and military support from Iran, are united not only against US hegemony but have also effectively linked themselves and their struggle to form a united front against the US and Israel. This new unity is evident from Yemen, Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Lebanon to Palestine.

During the month of May, the sabotage attack on the United Arab Emirates harbour of al-Fujairah followed by the armed drone attack on Aramco in Saudi Arabia by Yemen's Houthis were clear and strong messages. Both the Emirates and Saudi hubs make it possible to export millions of barrels of Middle Eastern oil while bypassing the Straits of Hormuz; these hubs will become more important in coming years. Thus the importance of the message: the sabotage and the drone attack are a foretaste of what could happen next, even if alternatives are found to shipping global supplies through the Strait. No country in the Middle East will be allowed to export its oil if Iran is prevented from doing so.

Moreover, the Israeli policy of strangling Gaza has united the various Palestinian groups operating in the city into one military operational room against the Israeli army. Twelve Palestinian military groups have joined forces in Gaza and have coordinated the bombing of Israeli cities and other targets to stand against Netanyahu's strangulation of Gaza and its inhabitants.



The conclusion is simple: the more blatantly the US establishment and Israel disregard the rights of Middle Eastern countries and populations to live in peace among each other and recover their occupied territories from Israel, the stronger non-state actor groups will become among the populations where they operate.

Iran benefits tremendously from the consequences of the US-Israeli policies. It thereby increases its influence in various parts of the Middle East. It can ask its partners to defend its interests and stand with it in case of danger to its national security.

The US no doubt is financially profiting from maintaining instability among Middle Eastern countries, which reinforces US hegemony over oil-rich countries. Keeping Iran as a model enemy has helped promote US weapon sales to an unprecedented level. Tribal and ethnic struggles in the Middle East serve to keep the countries in this party of the world divided. Regional strife also prevents coordination of policies among oil-rich countries, ensuring that no commercial market exchange or monetary unification is possible in the medium or long term.

During this latest crisis between Tehran and Washington, the US administration has failed to protect the Gulf countries from the Emirates sabotage and the Aramco attack. Nevertheless, its show of force and verbal threats – sending jet carrier and B-52 bombers to face the alleged threat from Iran – helped sell more US made military equipment, including \$8 billion of Patriot interception missiles to oppose the threat of Iranian missiles being launched against Gulf countries.

Of course, no war took place and both Iran and the US have shown their willingness to avoid it at all costs. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo seems now to be disregarding his earlier 12-point ultimatum and now says that his country is willing to negotiate without pre-conditions with Iran. Pompeo's willingness for unconditional negotiations means very little because Iran has clearly stated its pre-conditions for talks with the US establishment: honour the JCPOA nuclear deal and lift the sanctions. On this basis Iran would open discussions, but would be unlikely to make any concessions until the end of Trump's mandate in 2020. Iran looks much stronger today and the US much weaker.

Hezbollah is said to be ready to go to war for Iran and to bomb Israel. Yemen is already serving Iran's objectives with its use of drones against Saudi oil facilities. The Iraqi non-state actors showed their capacities and the US got the message: US forces will be targeted in Iraq. In Gaza, the Palestinian groups deployed their new weapons and showed their readiness to join the common front in case of war against Israel. This general mobilisation has twisted the arms of the US and Israel, imposing a no-war situation in the Middle East for the foreseeable future. Today, the US and Israel have advanced weapons and the latest military technology, but their adversaries in the Middle East are also well-equipped, even if not at the same level. Their precision missiles and armed drones may be enough to maintain "the necessary" balance of power.

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