

Scapegoating Iran

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Seventeen years of war in the Middle East and what do we have to show for it? Iraq after our 2003 invasion and occupation is no longer a unified country. Its once modern infrastructure is largely destroyed, and the nation has fractured into warring enclaves.

We have lost the war in Afghanistan. The Taliban is resurgent and has a presence in over 70 percent of the country.

Libya is a failed state.

Yemen after three years of relentless airstrikes and a blockade is enduring one of the world's worst humanitarian disasters. The 500 "moderate" rebels we funded and armed in Syria at a cost of \$500 million are in retreat after instigating a lawless reign of terror.

The military adventurism has cost [a staggering \\$5.6 trillion](#) as our infrastructure crumbles, austerity guts basic services and half the population of the United States [lives at or near poverty levels](#). The endless wars in the Middle East are the biggest strategic blunder in American history and herald the death of the empire.

Someone has to be blamed for debacles that have resulted in hundreds of thousands of dead, including at least 200,000 civilians, and millions driven from their homes. Someone has to be blamed for the proliferation of radical jihadist groups throughout the Middle East, the continued worldwide terrorist attacks, the wholesale destruction of cities and towns under relentless airstrikes and the abject failure of U.S. and U.S.-backed forces to stanch the insurgencies. You can be sure it won't be the generals, the politicians such as George W. Bush, Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, the rabid neocons such as Dick Cheney, [Paul Wolfowitz](#) and [John Bolton](#) who sold us the wars, the Central Intelligence Agency, the arms contractors who profit from perpetual war or the celebrity pundits on the airwaves and in newspapers who serve as cheerleaders for the mayhem.

"The failed policies, or lack of policies, of the United States, which violate international law, have left the Middle East in total chaos," the Iranian ambassador to the United Nations, Gholamali Khoshroo, told me when we met in New York City. "The United States, to cover up these aggressive, reckless and costly policies, blames Iran. Iran is blamed for their failures in Yemen, Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria and Lebanon."

The Trump administration "is very naive about the Middle East and Iran," the ambassador said.

“It can only speak in the language of threats—pressure, sanctions, intervention. These policies have failed in the region. They are very risky and costly. Let the Americans deal with the problems of the countries they have already invaded and attacked. America lacks constructive power in the Middle East. It is unable to govern even a village in Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen or Syria. All it can do is use force and destructive power. This U.S. administration wants the Middle East and the whole world to bow to it. This is not a policy conducive to sound relationships with sovereign states, especially those countries that have resisted American influence.”

“The plan to arm ‘moderate’ rebels in Syria was a cover to topple [Syrian President] Bashar al-Assad,” the ambassador went on. “The Americans knew there were no ‘moderate’ rebels. They knew these weapons would get into the hands of terrorist groups like Daesh [Islamic State], Al-Nusra and their affiliates. Once again, the American policy failed. The Americans succeeded in destroying a country. They succeeded in creating bloodbaths. They succeeded in displacing millions of people. But they gained nothing. The sovereignty of Syria is expanding by the day. It is hard to imagine [what President Trump is offering as a strategy](#) in Syria. One day, he says, ‘I will move out of Syria very soon, very quickly.’ The next day he says, ‘If Iran is there, we should stay.’ I wonder if the American taxpayers know how much of their money has been wasted in Iraq, Syria and Yemen?”

Image on the right: Iran’s Ambassador to the United Nations Gholam Ali Khoshroo



Trump’s unilateral decision to withdraw from the Iran nuclear deal, although Iran was in compliance with the agreement, was the first salvo in this effort to divert attention from these failures to Iran. Bolton, the new national security adviser, and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, along with Trump lawyer Rudy Giuliani, advocate the overthrow of the Iranian government, with [Giuliani saying last month](#) that Trump is “as committed to regime change as we [an inner circle of presidential advisers] are.”

“The Iran nuclear deal was possible following several letters by President Barack Obama assuring the Iranian leadership that America had no intention of violating Iranian sovereignty,” Ambassador Khoshroo said. “America said it wanted to engage in a serious dialogue on equal footing and mutual interests and concerns. These assurances led to the negotiations that concluded with the JCPOA [[Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action](#)]. From the beginning, however, America was not forthcoming in its dealings with us on the JCPOA. President Obama wanted the agreement to be implemented, but he did not want it implemented in its full capacity. Congress, on the day JCPOA was implemented, passed a law warning Europeans that were doing business with Iran. The staffs of companies had to apply for a visa to the United States if they had traveled to Iran for business purposes. This began on the first day. The Americans were not always very forthcoming. OFAC [Office of Foreign Funds Control] gave ambiguous answers to many of the questions that companies had about

sanctions, but at least in words the Obama administration supported the JCPOA and saw the agreement as the basis for our interactions.”

“President Trump, however, even as a candidate, called the agreement ‘the worst deal America ever made,’ ” the ambassador said. “He called this deal a source of embarrassment for America. Indeed, it was not the deal but America’s unilateral decision to walk away from an agreement that was supported by the United Nations Security Council, and in fact co-sponsored and drafted by the United States, that is the source of embarrassment for America. To walk away from an international agreement and then threaten a sovereign country is the real source of embarrassment since Iran was in full compliance while the U.S. never was.”

“In 2008, the Israelis told the world that Iran was only some days away from acquiring an atomic bomb,” he said. “The Israelis said there had to be a military strike to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon. What has happened since? During the last two years, there have been 11 [reports by the IAEA](#) [International Atomic Energy Agency] clearly confirming and demonstrating Iran’s full compliance with the JCPOA. All of the accusations [about] Iran using nuclear facilities for military purposes were refuted by the IAEA as well as by Europe, Russia, China, along with many other countries in Asia, Latin America, Africa. America is concerned about Iranian influence in the region and seeks to contain Iran because the U.S. administration realizes that America’s policies in the Middle East have failed. Their own statements about Iran repeatedly contradict each other. One day they say, ‘Iran is so weak it will collapse,’ and the next day they say, ‘Iran is governing several Arab capitals in the Middle East.’ ”

Iran announced recently that it has tentative plans to [produce the feedstock for centrifuges](#), the machines that enrich uranium, if the nuclear deal is not salvaged by European members of the JCPOA. European countries, dismayed by Trump’s decision to withdraw from the agreement, are attempting to renegotiate the deal, which imposes restrictions on Iran’s nuclear development in exchange for the lifting of international sanctions.

Why go to war with a country that abides by an agreement it has signed with the United States? Why attack a government that is the mortal enemy of the Taliban, along with other jihadist groups, including al-Qaida and Islamic State, that now threaten us after we created and armed them? Why shatter the de facto alliance we have with Iran in Iraq and Afghanistan? Why further destabilize a region already dangerously volatile?

The architects of these wars are in trouble. They have watched helplessly as the instability and political vacuum they caused, especially in Iraq, left Iran as the dominant power in the region. Washington, in essence, elevated its nemesis. It has no idea how to reverse its mistake, beyond attacking Iran. Those both in the U.S. and abroad who began or promoted these wars see a conflict with Iran as a solution to their foreign and increasingly domestic dilemmas.

For example, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, mired in corruption scandals, hopes that by fostering a conflict with Iran he can divert attention away from investigations into his abuse of power and the massacres Israel carries out against Palestinians, along with Israel’s accelerated seizure of Palestinian land.

“The most brutal regime is now in power in Israel,” the Iranian ambassador said. “It has no regard for international law or humanitarian law. It violates Security Council resolutions regarding settlements, its capital and occupation.

Look at what Israel has done in Gaza in the last 30 days. On the same day America was unlawfully transferring its embassy to Jerusalem, 60 unarmed Palestinian protesters were killed by Israeli snipers. [Israelis] were dancing in Jerusalem while the blood of unarmed Palestinians was running in Gaza. The Trump administration gives total support and impunity to Israel. This angers many people in the Middle East, including many in Saudi Arabia. It is a Zionist project to portray Iran as the main threat to peace in the Middle East. Israel introducing Iran as a threat is an attempt to divert attention from the crimes this regime is committing, but these too are failed policies that will backfire. They are policies designed to cover weakness."

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, [facing internal unrest](#), launched the war in Yemen as a vanity project to bolster his credentials as a military leader. Now he desperately needs to deflect attention from the quagmire and humanitarian disaster he created.

"Saudi Arabia, as part of [the civil war in Yemen], has a tactical and strategic cooperation with Israel against Iran," the ambassador said. "But the Saudi regime is defying the sentiments of its own people. How long will this be possible? For three years now, Saudi Arabia, assisted by the United States, has bombed the Yemeni people and imposed a total blockade that includes food and medicine. Nothing has been resolved. Once again, Iran is blamed for this failure by Saudi Arabia and the United States in Yemen. Even if Iran wanted to help the Yemenis, it is not possible due to the total blockade. The Yemeni people asked for peace negotiations from the first day of the war. But Saudi military adventurism and its desire to test its military resolve made any peaceful solution impossible. The U.S. and the U.K. provide military and logistical support, including cluster bombs to be used by the Saudis in Yemen. The Emiratis are bombing Yemen. All such actions are doomed to failure since there is no military solution in Yemen. There is only a political solution. Look at the targets of Saudi airstrikes in Yemen: funerals. Wedding ceremonies. Agricultural fields. Houses. Civilians. How do the Saudis expect the Yemeni people to greet those who bomb them? With hugs? The war has cost a lot of money, and Trump responds by [saying \[to Saudi Arabia\]](#), 'Oh you have money. [Paraphrasing here.] Please buy our ['beautiful weapons.'](#) They are killing beautiful children with these 'beautiful' weapons. It is a disaster. It is tragic."

And then there is President Donald Trump, desperate for a global crusade he can use to mask his ineptitude, the rampant corruption of his administration and his status as an international pariah when he runs for re-election in 2020.

"Of course, blaming and threatening Iran is not new," the ambassador said. "This has been going on for 40 years. The Iranian people and the Iranian government are accustomed to this nonsense. United States intervention in the internal affairs of Iran goes back a long time, including the [Iranian] war with Iraq, when the United States supported Saddam Hussein. Then America invaded Iraq in 2003 in their so-called 'intervention for democracy and elimination of WMDs.' Iran has always resisted and will always resist U.S. threats."

"America was in Iran 40 years ago," the ambassador said. "About 100,000 U.S. advisers were in Iran during the rule of the shah, who was among the closest allies of America. America was unable to keep this regime in power because the Iranian people revolted against such dependency and suppression. Since the fall of the shah in 1979, for 40 years, America continued to violate international law, especially the Algeria agreements it signed with Iran in 1981."

The [Algeria Declaration](#) was a set of agreements between the United States and Iran that resolved the Iranian hostage crisis. It was brokered by the Algerian government. The U.S. committed itself in the Algeria Declaration to refrain from interference in Iranian internal affairs and to lift trade sanctions on Iran and a freeze on Iranian assets.

The warmongers have no more of a plan for “regime change” in Iran than they had in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya or Syria. European allies, whom Trump alienated when he walked away from the Iranian nuclear agreement, are in no mood to cooperate with Washington. The Pentagon, even if it wanted to, does not have the hundreds of thousands of troops it would need to attack and occupy Iran. And the idea—pushed by lunatic fringe figures like Bolton and Giuliani—that the marginal and discredited Iranian resistance group Mujahedeen-e-Khalq (MEK), which fought alongside Saddam Hussein in the war against Iran and is viewed by most Iranians as composed of traitors, is a viable counterforce to the Iranian government is ludicrous. In all these equations the 80 million people in Iran are ignored just as the people of Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria were ignored. Perhaps they would not welcome a war with the United States. Perhaps if attacked they would resist. Perhaps they don’t want to be occupied. Perhaps a war with Iran would be interpreted throughout the region as a war against Shiism. But these are calculations that the ideologues, who know little about the instrument of war and even less about the cultures or peoples they seek to dominate, are unable to fathom.

“The Middle East has many problems: insecurity, instability, problems with natural resources such as water, etc.,” Khoshroo said. “All of these problems have been made worse by foreign intervention as well as Israel’s lawlessness. The issue of Palestine is at the heart of turmoil in the Middle East for Muslims. Any delay in finding solutions to these wounds in the Middle East exposes this region to more dangerous threats. Americans say they want the Middle East to be free from violent extremism, but this will only happen when the Middle East is free from occupation and foreign intervention. The Americans are selling their weapons throughout the Middle East. They calculate how much money they can earn from destruction. They don’t care about human beings. They don’t care about security or democratic process or political process. This is worrisome.”

“What are the results of American policies in the Middle East?” he asked. “All of the American allies in the region are in turmoil. Only Iran is secure and stable. Why is this the case? Why, during the last 40 years, has Iran been stable? Is it because Iran has no relationship with America? Why is there hostility between Iran and America? Can’t the Americans see that Iran’s stability is important for the region? We are surrounded by Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen. What good would come from destabilizing Iran? What would America get out of that?”

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