

Why US Subversion Flopped in Iran

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Global Research, February 24, 2018

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)
Theme: [Media Disinformation](#), [Military Militarization](#)
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At the end of December 2017 the Western media reported “widespread” protests sweeping Iran. Narratives indistinguishable from the US-engineered “Arab Spring” in 2011 flooded headlines and social media regarding a “popular uprising” spurred first by alleged economic grievances before protesters then began making demands echoing the US State Department regarding Iran’s internal domestic affairs as well as its foreign policy.

The protests were in fact so indistinguishable from the [now admittedly US-engineered “Arab Spring”](#) that still-fresh disillusionment regarding the fate of nations like Libya and Syria likely played a role in blunting the efficacy of the protests in Iran.

Western Propaganda Outlived Actual Unrest

An article in Politico titled, “[Why the Iranian Uprising Won’t Die](#),” in an attempt to qualify and promote the West’s narrative regarding the Iranian protests would claim:

...Iranians were enraged as they struggled to feed their children while their government spent billions on its foreign adventures in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and elsewhere. While Iran was made poor, the regime became richer. While Iranians suffered, the regime’s allies became powerful and prosperous.

Yet when Politico published the article on January 7, 2018, written by RAND Corporation analyst Alireza Nader, the protests had already since “died.”

Politico’s article wasn’t the only one published days and even weeks after the protests had already ended – indicating that the Western media had prepared weeks – even months of propaganda to fuel Iranian unrest within information space as US-backed opposition groups attempted to fuel it on the ground.

Despite preparations that US policy papers indicate were years in the making – which included not only the creation of opposition fronts and armed militant groups within and along Iran’s borders but the encirclement of Iran itself by US military bases including in Syria and northern Iraq under the pretext of “fighting the Islamic State (ISIS)” – the protests quickly ran their course and ended.

If the majority of Iranians were truly driven into the streets by extensive economic and political grievances – and since none of these grievances could have possibly been addressed yet – it is unlikely the protests would have died out so quickly and with a minimum use of force by the Iranian government, even according to the Western media

itself.

However, if the protests were organized by the West and led by illegitimate, unpopular opposition movements within Iran and from abroad – and after the West has already long-abused these now transparent tactics of subversion – “widespread” protests diminishing in just days was not only likely, but inevitable.

Washington’s Extensive Preparations

Preparations for the overthrow of Iran stretch back well over a decade and have transcended multiple US presidential administrations – both Republican and Democrat – including the current administration of US President Donald Trump and his predecessor, US **President Barack Obama**.

The Brookings Institution in its 2009 “[Which Path to Persia? Options for a New American Strategy toward Iran](#),” laid out extensive plans for undermining and overthrowing the Iranian government.

Chapters in the paper included:

Chapter 1: An Offer Iran Shouldn’t Refuse: Persuasion;

Chapter 3: Going All the Way: Invasion;

Chapter 4: The Osiraq Option: Airstrikes;

Chapter 5: Leave it to Bibi: Allowing or Encouraging an Israeli Military Strike

Chapter 6: The Velvet Revolution: Supporting a Popular Uprising;

Chapter 7: Inspiring an Insurgency: Supporting Iranian Minority;

And Opposition Groups and;

Chapter 8: The Coup: Supporting a Military Move Against the Regime.

It should be noted that each and every option has been pursued since 2009, either against Iran directly or against Syria in a bid to spread conflict over Iranian borders. This includes Washington’s use of Israel to carry out airstrikes on Syria while the US attempts to maintain plausible deniability.

Within these chapters, detailed plans were laid out to create and back both political opposition organizations and armed militant groups. It laid out a variety of economic sanctions that could be used to pressure Tehran and create division and discontent among the Iranian population. It also proposed methods of attacking Iran militarily both covertly and overtly as well as possible ways of goading Tehran into full-scale war.

The paper was written shortly after the failed US-backed “Green Revolution” during that same year – a US-engineered protest that was larger in scale and duration than the most recent protests.

US Sought to Draw Out and Overextend Iran Ahead of Subversion

Another paper – by the RAND Corporation also published in 2009 – titled, “[Dangerous But Not Omnipotent : Exploring the Reach and Limitations of Iranian Power in the Middle East](#),” noted that Iran’s foreign policy was pursued mainly in self-defense. The paper explicitly noted that (emphasis added):

Iran’s strategy is largely defensive, but with some offensive elements. Iran’s strategy of protecting the regime against internal threats, deterring aggression, safeguarding the homeland if aggression occurs, and extending influence is in large part a defensive one that also serves some aggressive tendencies when coupled with expressions of Iranian regional aspirations. It is in part a response to U.S. policy pronouncements and posture in the region, especially since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. **The Iranian leadership takes very seriously the threat of invasion given the open discussion in the United States of regime change, speeches defining Iran as part of the “axis of evil,” and efforts by U.S. forces to secure base access in states surrounding Iran.**

The paper discusses Iran’s extensive ties to Syria and Lebanon’s Hezbollah as well as its growing ties with Iraq. These ties – according to the RAND paper itself – were pursued to create a buffer in Iran’s near-abroad against regional US military aggression.

By 2011, the US was pursuing a proxy war consuming the entire Middle East and North Africa region (MENA) with Libya overthrown and left in perpetual ruination by the end of the year and Syria consumed by nationwide conflict as foreign-funded and armed militants flooded the country from Syria’s borders with Turkey and Jordan.

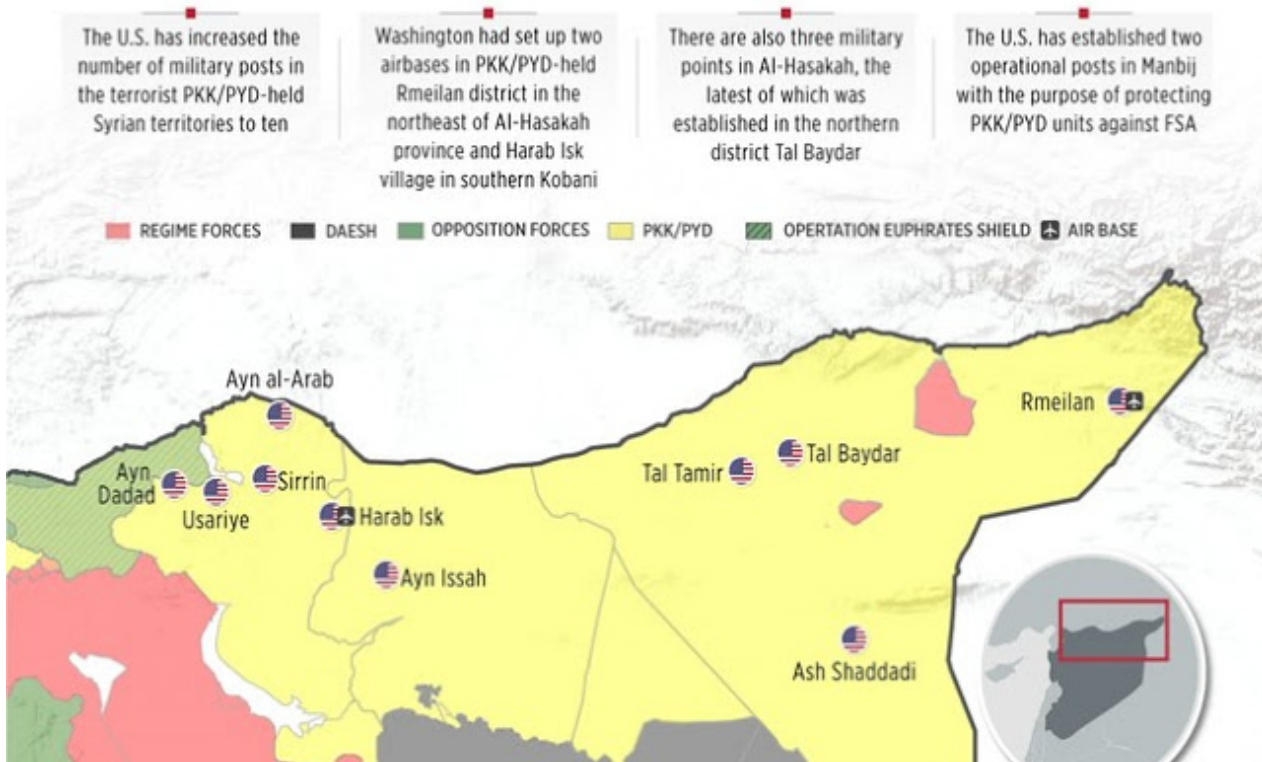
The fact that Libya was overthrown first, then used as a springboard for the proxy invasion of Syria illustrates the wider regional context that drove the US-NATO intervention in Libya.

In essence, the US was attacking the pillars of Iran’s national defense in its near-abroad. Knowing how critical Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq were to Iran’s national defense strategy of hindering US encirclement and keeping in check Washington’s regional allies particularly in the Persian Gulf – the region-wide destabilization was designed to draw the Iranians into a costly regional intervention.

Iranian forces have lent extensive aid to Syria and Iraq including direct and indirect military support – the extent of which when coupled with decades of economic sanctions imposed upon Iran by the US and its Western allies – contributed to the so-called “economic” grievances recent US-backed protests in Iran attempted to leverage.

The US has maintained troops in several Persian Gulf states including Qatar and Bahrain, a continuous military presence in Iraq since the 2003 invasion, and a US military presence in Afghanistan on Iran’s eastern borders since 2001.

US INCREASES MILITARY POSTS SUPPORTING PKK/PYD IN SYRIA



More recently, the US has occupied eastern Syria and lent extensive aid to Kurdish militant groups both within Syria and in northern Iraq. The US also provides political and covert support to Buluchi terrorists in southwest Pakistan and western Afghanistan.

On a map, it is clear that the US has continued to further encircle Iran since 2011 both with its own military, and with proxies engaged in costly conflicts along Iran's peripheries.

The Opposition Was Intentionally Left "Unnamed"

Despite sensational Western headlines promoting and attempting to perpetuate unrest in Iran, the Western media was particularly careful about not identifying the political and militant groups taking to the streets. Just like in Libya and Syria where "pro-democracy protesters" were eventually revealed to be extremists drawn from listed terrorist organizations, many of those taking part in Iran's protests had likewise unscrupulous backgrounds.

Protesters in Iran invoked the names of opposition groups and figures mentioned by name in the 2009 Brookings paper under a subheading titled, "Finding the Right Proxies." These included the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK) – a US State Department designated foreign terrorist organization delisted in 2012 for the sole purpose of allowing the US to more openly fund and arm the group. It also included exiled Iranian opposition figure Reza Pahlavi, the son of the ousted Iranian Sha who now resides in the United States.

The bulk of pro-opposition coverage in Iran came from overtly US-funded media sources including the US State Department's Farsi-language version of Voice of America and the New York-based "[Center for Human Rights in Iran.](#)"

To then claim the recent Iran "protests" were merely "spontaneous" expressions of Iranian

frustration and not simply the next step in an admitted US conspiracy against Tehran is an absurdity the Western media is having increasing difficulties selling to global audiences.

Washington's Return on Investment

Still, the unrest, when coupled with ongoing efforts by the US to encircle and envelop Iran, have at the very least applied additional pressure on Tehran – forcing it to invest more resources at home while still fighting against multiple US-backed proxy conflicts across the region.

The 2009 Brookings paper “Which Path to Persia?” explicitly states that:

While the ultimate goal is to remove the regime, working with the internal opposition also could be a form of coercive pressure on the Iranian regime, giving the United States leverage on other issues.

It continues by stating:

In theory, the United States could create coercive leverage by threatening the regime with instability or even overthrow and, after having done so, use this leverage to force concessions on other issues such as Iran's nuclear program or support for militants in Iraq.

However, each time the US attempts to use foreign-funded opposition and militant groups to destabilize Iran – especially as alternatives to Western media domination continue to grow – this tactic loses a certain degree of credibility, sustainability, and thus viability.

That the recent protests ran their course so quickly despite the fact that Iran has been overstretched militarily and economically amid years of conflict in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, illustrates just how unsustainable this foreign policy option has become for the US when targeting well-prepared, formidable states like Iran.

A combination of well-honed information warfare, well-prepared security forces, and well-organized counter-protests on Tehran's part blunted this latest round of US-backed subversion.

Washington's apparent impotence versus Tehran when coupled with its struggling attempts to overthrow the Syrian government and assert hegemony over Iraq further undermines the illusion of legitimacy the US has attempted for decades to construct around its otherwise illegitimate hegemonic foreign policy.

Washington's increasingly sloppy and transparent meddling in Iran will undermine efforts later this year as Washington prepares to destabilize other nations everywhere from South America to Southeast Asia. And with the US accusing Russia of meddling in American politics, obvious questions will be raised as to why it is not acceptable for Moscow to allegedly “influence US elections,” but acceptable for the US through organizations like the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and USAID to not only openly influence foreign elections around the world, but to openly run entire opposition parties from Washington D.C.

Washington's return on investment for its extensive and so-far failed attempts to destabilize and overthrow Iran is indeed questionable. Iran – as well as other nations likely to be targeted by the US next – will simply review this latest round of protests and be better prepared for it next time. As more people become aware of tactics used during US-backed subversion, these tactics will grow less effective.

US Still Losing in Syria and Iraq

Meanwhile, the protests in Iran seem to have had little impact on Washington's precarious position in nearby Syria as Syrian forces continue making advances into Idlib and as the US struggles to justify its continued presence in the eastern region of the country. If Idlib is secured, it will leave US and Turkish occupation forces at the fringes of the conflict and at the fringes of international legitimacy.

Irregular warfare targeting Turkish or American forces in Syria could transform their respective occupations into untenable and costly conflicts. It will be difficult to differentiate between Syrian, Russian, or Iranian-backed irregular forces and the terrorist organizations Turkey and the US themselves have been arming and funding while simultaneously claiming to fight.

Just as the repeated overuse of US-backed protests have cost the US a once valuable tool from its geopolitical bag of tricks, the use of terrorism against targeted states appears poised to boomerang back Washington's way. Like all waning empires in human history, the US will be unable to simply "go home." It will require many more years of direct and indirect conflict before the US is fully uprooted from the MENA region. However, the spectacular failure of US-backed subversion in Iran before New Year's may be further evidence of US hegemony's irreversible decline.

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***Tony Cartalucci** is a Bangkok-based geopolitical researcher and writer, especially for the online magazine ["New Eastern Outlook"](#) where this article was originally published.*

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Michel Chossudovsky

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

Year: 2015

Pages: 240 Pages

List Price: \$22.95

Special Price: \$15.00

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