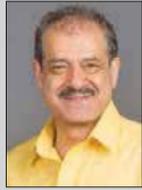


Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh tweeted on Thursday that last year's deadly attack on the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C. by supporters of then-president, Donald Trump, has many lessons for Americans.

OPINION

U.S. interests still lie in passing Iran off as a nuclear threat

By Ali Abootalebi*



The American foreign policy establishment is complex and has many layers. Foreign policy in the United States, as in other countries, is presumed to promote its national interests. However, the nature of the state-society relations in the United States allows for many different layers of forces and influences in shaping foreign policy objectives and outcomes.

The presence of thousands of pressure groups and lobbyists assures their access to the helms of power in the country. The populace with vast, guaranteed civil rights and liberties can also interact and influence politicians and decision-makers through open debates, campaign donations, and the public and social media.

Nevertheless, the public opinion-makers (top three to five percent of the populace) and the abundance of money injection into the political process have a strong sway over the formation of public opinion in domestic and foreign affairs.

The American Middle Eastern policy in the post-Cold War era has hitherto merely replaced its anti-communist rhetoric and policy with 'the war on terror,' while maintaining the policy of support for Israel and the authoritarian Arab states and securing effective control over the flow of oil to its allies in Europe and Asia. The Obama administration's Iran nuclear agreement (JCPOA) was a tactical move to allay concerns of Israel and Arab states about Iran's nuclear activities.

The Trump administration's ideological leaning and interest lent itself to the motto, 'America First.' For the religious conservatives and political right, it promised a return to the more traditional American values to confront the 'excesses of neoliberalism.' The liberal drive for Equality, Diversity, and Inclusivity (EDI) has challenged the traditional conservative values of self-help, family, religion, liberty, and limited government.

Trump's message of 'economic nationalism,' and 'America First' resonated well with the religious and political right, albeit there was his questionable personal devotion and dedication to the Evangelicals. Trump owed his rise to power to the Evangelicals, the Christian right, and the neoconservatives. In foreign policy, 'American exceptionalism' and its 'indispensable power' implied the continuing American leadership on the global stage.

So, U.S. support of Israel became even more pronounced in Washington's Middle Eastern policy. Trump's pandering to the oil-rich, authoritarian Arab states also supplemented his and his followers' stance on Israel that also countered the "Iranian menace."

Trump's withdrawal from the JCPOA fell nicely within his administration's ideological and sociopolitical vision.

President Biden's Middle East policy may tactically differ from Trump's, but the United States' strategic concerns in the region remain the same. Biden has thus far continued with the general direction of the Trump administration. The protection of Israel as an ally and a strategic military outpost remains a core part of U.S. Middle East policy.

As such, the Biden administration will continue to pursue U.S. strategic interests in the region to take advantage of the 'threat of a nuclear Iran,' in order to continue with its historical, post-WWII policy.

The U.S. has successfully exploited the Soviet (and Russian) threat, the Arab-Israeli wars, and now the Iranian threat to facilitate its military buildup, arms sales, and direct and indirect covert and overt interventions in the region.

The U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria simply implies fewer military personnel on the ground, but not less engagement. True, the Pivot to Asia remains high on the Biden agenda, but carbon-energy-abundant Russia, and energy-dependent-China, as well as their political ambitions beyond their respective regions stretch into the Middle East and are of strategic concern to the United States.

* Ali Abootalebi is a professor of political science at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire.



IRGC: Drills forced Israelis to halt empty anti-Iran threats

The spokesman of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) said Iran's recent show of force compelled Israeli rulers to halt their empty military threats against the country.

In an interview with Al-Alam television, Brigadier General Ramezan Sharif referred to the IRGC's latest large-scale military exercises, saying the Israelis issued lots of threats against the Islamic Republic only before the drills, according to Press TV.

The IRGC held massive military exercises, dubbed Great Prophet 17, in Iran's southern coast last month. During the five-day maneuvers, Iran's senior commanders sternly warned Israel against continuing its anti-Iran rhetoric.

Before the drills, Israeli officials had ratcheted up threats against Iran, especially over the ongoing negotiations in Vienna to revive the 2015 Iran nuclear agreement, which the Israeli regime staunchly opposes.

They suggested that Israel will attack Iran and the country's nuclear facilities.

However, Brigadier General Sharif dismissed the remarks as empty rhetoric, echoing Israeli military assessments that the regime lacks the power to launch large-scale attacks against Iran.

"After the exercise, the Zionists' prime minister [Naftali Bennett] officially or-



FARS

dered their military men not to talk about Iran at all," he said.

The brigadier general stated that the Israelis are clearly interested in taking destructive action against Iran's nuclear facilities, but the Islamic Republic's deterrent power and the location of its nuclear facilities prevent the Tel Aviv regime.

"Regardless of whether they act or

not, our assessment is that [the threats] are rhetoric intended for political gains, especially to overcome their problems in their occupied lands, which makes them try to distract [the public] with an external issue," Brigadier General Sharif added.

He said if the Israelis felt that they were not dealt with decisively, they would con-

duct major attacks against the intended country, especially with regard to nuclear issues.

Pointing to the Zionist regime's attacks against the nuclear facilities of Iraq and Syria, Brigadier General Sharif said the Israelis' main manifesto is that no Muslim or Arab country has the right to have a nuclear program.

Iran marks second martyrdom anniversary of Ukrainian plane crash

Foreign Ministry: Tehran ready for bilateral talks with related states

International Desk

The second martyrdom anniversary of the victims of a Ukrainian passenger plane crash near the Iranian capital was commemorated at a ceremony in Tehran's Behesht Zahra cemetery on Friday.

The ceremony was attended by Iranian Vice President and President of the Martyr Foundation and Veterans Affairs Amir-Hossein Qazizadeh Hashemi, according to isaar.ir.

On January 8, 2020, the Ukraine International Airlines Flight PS752, en route to Kiev while carrying mostly Iranians, crashed minutes after takeoff near the Iranian capital, killing all of the 176 passengers and crew on board.

Hours before the tragedy, Iran had launched a retaliatory missile strike, as part of its revenge for the Jan. 3, 2020 U.S. assassination of anti-terror commander Lt. Gen. Qassem Soleimani, against a U.S.-run base in western Iraq and put the



IRANIAN VICE PRESIDENT AMIR-HOSSEIN QAZIZADEH HASHEMI (2ND L) PAYS TRIBUTE TO THE VICTIMS OF A 2020 UKRAINIAN PASSENGER PLANE CRASH IN A CEREMONY IN TEHRAN'S BEHESHT ZAHRA CEMETERY ON JANUARY 7, 2022.

country's air defenses on high alert due to increased American aerial activity in the aftermath of the strike.

Iran acknowledged days later

that the mismanagement of an air defense unit's radar system by its operator was the key human error that led to the accident.

Tehran has promised that all those culpable in the incident would face justice and allocated 200 million euros for compensation to the victim's families.

Paying tribute to the souls of the plane crash martyrs, Qazizadeh Hashemi said on the second anniversary of the tragic event, "We pay respect to the sad incident's martyrs and hold their memories dear."

He added that measures have been taken to provide services to the martyrs' families, noting that cases pertaining to 73 families, out of a total of 133, are being handled, while expressing readiness to work on the other families' cases.

The vice president expressed hope that the legal procedures in handling the cases would be conducted and those culpable would be introduced in order to help assuage the bereaved families.

He noted that some of the martyrs' families are living abroad, saying his foundation is prepared to handle their cases

as well.

Ready for bilateral talks

In addition, in a Friday statement on the incidents' anniversary, the Iranian Foreign Ministry said following the tragic event, all of the country's related organizations announced the main cause of the accident and fulfilled their responsibilities according to domestic law and international commitments precisely, transparently and quickly, according to mfa.gov.ir.

Expressing condolences to the victims' families, the Foreign Ministry added Iran is prepared to hold bilateral talks with each of the concerned countries over the incident despite illegal measures by certain states seeking to gain political advantages by exploiting the accident and sorrows of the martyrs' families.

It stressed that any talks should respect "sovereignty, domestic laws and international obligations".

Iran says daily COVID death toll below 20 after 22 months

National Desk

Iran's daily COVID-19 fatalities dropped to below 20 on Friday for the first time in the past 22 months, according to the Health Ministry.

The Health Ministry announced in a statement on Friday that the country's daily COVID-19 fatalities and cases in the past 24 hours stood at 19 and 1,178, respectively.

On March 6, 2020, the country had for the last time seen a daily death toll of less than 22, with fatalities standing at 17.

According to the ministry, the total COVID-19 death toll and cases since the beginning of the outbreak in the country in late February 2020 stand at 131,821 and 6,204,224.

It said 2,060 patients are in critical condition, and 245 new

ones have been hospitalized.

According to the statement, 6,048,957 people have so far either recovered from the disease or have been discharged from hospitals, and 42,661,568 diagnostic tests have been carried out in the country.

Since the outbreak, Iran has grappled with five waves of COVID-19 infections, with the last one being the greatest and deadliest of all and troubling the country until a few weeks ago. Sparked mainly due to the spread of the Delta variant, the wave caused the country to see record high daily deaths and cases of over 700 and 40,000, respectively.

The wave has subsided in the country thanks to the greater pace of the public vaccination on the back of the rise in imports and domestic production of CO-



IRNA

VID-19 jabs since the beginning of the incumbent administration's term in office in August under President Seyyed Ebrahim Raeisi.

Iran has so far imported over 150 million doses of COVID-19 jabs and produced a number of vaccines including Fakhra (Defense Ministry), Razi Cov Pars

(Razi Vaccine and Serum Research Institute), and Soberana 2 — or PastoCoVac (Cuba's Instituto Finlay de Vacunas and Iran's Pasteur Institute).

The Health Ministry added in its Friday statement that the total number of administered vaccine doses in the country stands at 121,982,424, of which 60,032,419 have been given to people as the first dose, 52,444,380 as the second dose, and 9,505,625 as the third, booster, shot.

Iran on December 19 said the first definite case of infection with the Omicron variant of the coronavirus was detected in the country and two suspicious patients were also identified.

According to the latest figure, a total of 244 cases of the Omicron variant have been detected in the country.