

PEPE ESCOBAR: Iran Squeezed Between Imperial Psychos and European Cowards

Berlin, Paris and London assumed Tehran could not afford to leave the JCP0A even if it was not receiving any of the promised economic rewards. Now the EU3 are facing the hour of truth, writes Pepe Escobar.

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in Bangkok

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The Trump administration unilaterally cheated on the 2015 multinational, UN-endorsed JCP0A, or Iran nuclear deal. It has imposed an illegal, worldwide financial and energy blockade on all forms of trade with Iran – from oil and gas to exports of iron, steel, aluminum and copper. For all practical purposes, and in any geopolitical scenario, this is a declaration of war.

Successive U.S. governments have ripped international law to shreds; ditching the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action is only the latest instance. It doesn't matter that Tehran has fulfilled all its commitments to the deal – according to UN inspectors. Once the leadership in Tehran concluded that the U.S. sanctions tsunami is fiercer than ever, it decided to begin partially withdrawing from the deal.

President Hassan Rouhani was adamant: Iran has not left the JCP0A – yet. Tehran's measures are legal under the framework of articles 26 and 36 of the JCP0A – and European officials were informed in advance. But it's clear the EU3 (Germany,

France, Britain), who have always insisted on their vocal support for the JCPOA, must work seriously to alleviate the U.S.-provoked economic disaster to Iran if Tehran has any incentive to continue to abide by the agreement.

Russia and China – the pillars of Eurasia integration, to which Iran adheres – support Tehran's position. This was discussed extensively in Moscow by Sergey Lavrov and Iran's Javad Zarif, perhaps the world's top two foreign ministers.

At the same time, it's politically naïve to believe the Europeans will suddenly grow a backbone.

The comfortable assumption in Berlin, Paris and London was that Tehran could not afford to leave the JCPOA even if it was not receiving any of the economic rewards promised in 2015. Yet now the EU3 are facing the hour of truth.

It's hard to expect anything meaningful coming from an enfeebled Chancellor Angela Merkel, with Berlin already targeted by Washington's trade ire; a Brexit-paralyzed Britain; and a massively unpopular President Emmanuel Macron in France already threatening to impose his own sanctions if Tehran does not agree to limit its ballistic missile program. Tehran will never allow inspections over its thriving missile industry – and this was never part of the JCPOA to begin with.

As it stands, the EU3 are not buying Iranian oil. They are meekly abiding by the U.S. banking and oil/gas sanctions – which are now extended to manufacturing sectors – and doing nothing to protect Iran from its nasty effects. The implementation of INSTEX, the SWIFT alternative for trade with Iran, is languishing. Besides expressing lame “regrets”

about the U.S. sanctions, the EU3 are de facto playing the game on the side of U.S., Israel, Saudi Arabia and the Emirates; and by extension against Russia, China and Iran.

Rise of the Imperial Psychos

As Tehran de facto kicked the ball to the European court, both EU3 options are dire. To meaningfully defend the JCP0A will invite a ballistic reaction from the Trump administration. To behave like poodles – the most probable course of action – means emboldening even more the psychopaths doubling as imperial functionaries bent on a hot war against Iran at all costs; [Koch brothers Big Oil asset](#) and enraptured evangelist, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, and paid [Mujahideen-e Khalq asset](#) and notorious intel manipulator, National Security Advisor John Bolton.

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The Pompeo-Bolton gangster maneuver is hardly Bismarck's *Realpolitik*. It consists of relentlessly pushing Tehran to make a mistake, any mistake, in terms of “violating” its obligations under the JCP0A, so that this may be sold to gullible American public opinion as the proverbial “threat” to the “rules-based order” doubling as a *casus belli*.

There's one thing the no-holds-barred U.S. economic war against Iran has managed to achieve: internal unity in the Islamic Republic. Team Rouhani's initial aim for the JCP0A was to open up to Western trade (trade with Asia was always on) and somewhat curtail the power of the IRGC, or Revolutionary Guards, which control vast sectors of the

Iranian economy.

Washington's economic war proved instead the IRGC was right all along, echoing the finely-tuned geopolitical sentiment of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, who always emphasized the Americans cannot be trusted, ever.

And as much as Washington has branded the IRGC a "terrorist organization," Tehran replied in kind, branding CENTCOM the same.

Independent Persian Gulf oil traders dismiss the notion that the kleptocrat House of Saud – de facto run by Jared "of Arabia" Kushner's Whatsapp pal Mohammed bin Salman (MbS), the Saudi crown prince – holds up to 2.5 million barrels of oil a day in spare capacity capable of replacing Iran's 2 million barrels of exports (out of 3.45 million of total daily production). The House of Saud seems more interested in hiking oil prices for Asian customers.

Faulty Blockade

Washington's energy trade blockade of Iran is bound to fail.

China will continue to buy its 650,000 barrels a day – and may even buy more. Multiple Chinese companies trade technology and industrial services for Iranian oil.

Pakistan, Iraq and Turkey – all bordering Iran – will continue to buy Iranian high-quality light crude by every method of payment (including gold) and transportation available, formal or informal. Baghdad's trade relationship with Tehran will continue to thrive.

As economic suffocation won't suffice, Plan B is – what else

– the threat of a hot war.

It's by now established that the info, in fact rumors, about alleged Iranian maneuvers to attack U.S. interests in the Gulf was relayed to Bolton by the Mossad, at the White House, with Israeli National Security Adviser Meir Ben Shabbat personally briefing Bolton.

Everyone is aware of the corollary: a “reposition of assets” (in Pentagonese) – from the USS Abraham Lincoln carrier strike group deployment to four B-52 bombers landing in Al Udeid Air base in Qatar, all part of a “warning” to Iran.

A pre-war roaring crescendo now engulfs the Lebanese front as well as the Iranian front.

Reasons for Psychotic Rage

Iran's GDP is similar to Thailand's, and its military budget is similar to Singapore's. Bullying Iran is a geopolitical and geo-economic absurdity. Iran may be an emerging Global South actor – it could easily be a member of the G20 – but can never be construed as a “threat” to the U.S.

Yet Iran provokes psychopathic imperial functionaries to a paroxysm of rage for three serious reasons. Neocons never mind that trying to destroy Iraq cost over \$6 trillion – and it was a major war crime, a political disaster, and an economic abyss all rolled into one. Trying to destroy Iran will cost untold trillions more.

The most glaring reason for the irrational hatred is the fact the Islamic Republic is one of the very few nations on the planet consistently defying the hegemon – for four decades now.

The second reason is that Iran, just like Venezuela – and this is a combined war front – have committed the supreme anathema; trading on energy bypassing the petrodollar, the foundation stone of U.S. hegemony.

The third (invisible) reason is that to attack Iran is to disable emerging Eurasia integration, just like using NSA spying to ultimately put Brazil in the bag was an attack on Latin American integration.

The non-stop hysteria over whether President Donald Trump is being maneuvered into war on Iran by his pet psychopaths –



well, he actually directed Iran to “Call me” – eludes the Big Picture. As shown before, a possible shut down of the Strait of Hormuz, whatever the reasons, would be like a major meteor impact on the global economy. And that would inevitably translate as no Trump reelection in 2020.

The Strait of Hormuz would never need to be blocked if all the oil Iran is able to export is bought by China, other Asian clients and even Russia – which could relabel it. But Tehran wouldn't blink on blocking Hormuz if faced with total economic strangulation.

According to a dissident U.S. intel expert, “the United States is at a clear disadvantage in that if the Strait of Hormuz is shut the U.S. collapses. But if the U.S. can divert Russia from defending Iran, then Iran can be attacked and Russia will have accomplished nothing, as the neocons do not want detente with Russia and China. Trump does want detente but the Deep State does not intend to permit it.”

Assuming this scenario is correct, the usual suspects in the United States government are trying to divert Putin from the Strait of Hormuz question while keeping Trump weakened, as the neocons proceed 24/7 on the business of strangling Iran. It’s hard to see Putin falling for this not exactly elaborate trap.

Not Bluffing

So what happens next? Professor Mohammad Marandi at the Faculty of World Studies of the University of Tehran offers quite a sobering perspective: “After 60 days Iran will push things even further. I don’t think the Iranians are bluffing. They will also be pushing back at the Saudis and the Emiratis by different means.”

Marandi, ominously, sees “further escalation” ahead:

“Iranians have been preparing for war with the United States ever since the Iraq invasion in 2003. After what they’ve seen in Libya, in Syria, Yemen, Venezuela, they know that the Americans and Europeans are utterly brutal. The whole shore of the Persian Gulf on the Iranian side and the Gulf of Oman is full of tunnels and underground high-tech missiles. The Persian Gulf is full of ships

equipped with highly developed sea-to-sea missiles. If there is real war, all the oil and gas facilities in the region will be destroyed, all the tankers will be destroyed.”

And if that show comes to pass, Marandi regards the Strait of Hormuz as the “sideshow”:

“The Americans will be driven out of Iraq. Iraq exports 4 million barrels of oil a day; that would probably come to an end, through strikes and other means. It would be catastrophic for the Americans. It would be catastrophic for the world – and for Iran as well. But the Americans would simply not win.”

So as Marandi explains it – and Iranian public opinion now largely agrees – the Islamic Republic has leverage because they know “the Americans can’t afford to go to war. Crazyies like Pompeo and Bolton may want it, but many in the establishment don’t.”

Tehran may have developed a modified MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction) framework as leverage, mostly to push Trump ally MbS to cool down. “Assuming,” adds Marandi, “the madmen don’t get the upper hand, and if they do, then it’s war. But for the time being, I think that’s highly unlikely.”

All Options on the Table?

In Cold War 2.0 terms, from Central Asia to the Eastern Mediterranean and from the Indian Ocean to the Caspian Sea, Tehran is able to count on quite a set of formal and informal alliances. That not only centers on the Beirut-

Damascus-Baghdad-Tehran-Herat axis, but also includes Turkey and Qatar. And most important of all, the top actors on the Eurasian integration chessboard: the Russia and China in strategic partnership.

When Zarif met Lavrov last week in Moscow, they discussed virtually everything: Syria (they negotiate together in the Astana, now Nur-Sultan process), the Caspian, the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (of which Iran will become a member), the JCPOA and Venezuela.

The Trump administration was dragged kicking and screaming to meet Kim Jong-Un at the same table because of the DPRK's intercontinental ballistic missile tests. And then Kim ordered extra missile tests because, in his own words, as quoted by KCNA, "genuine peace and security of the country are guaranteed only by the strong physical force capable of defending its sovereignty."

Global South Watching

The overwhelming majority of Global South nations are watching the U.S. neocon offensive to ultimately strangle "the Iranian people", aware more than ever that Iran may be bullied to extinction because it does not possess a nuclear deterrent. The IRGC has reached the same conclusion.

That would mean the death of the JCPOA – and the Return of the Living Dead of "all options on the table."

But then, there'll be twists and turns in the Art of the (Demented) Deal. So what if, and it's a major "if", Donald Trump is being held hostage by his pet psychopaths?

Let The Dealer speak:

“We hope we don’t have to do anything with regard to the use of military force...We can make a deal, a fair deal. ... We just don’t want them to have nuclear weapons. Not too much to ask. And we would help put them back into great shape. They’re in bad shape right now. I look forward to the day where we can actually help Iran. We’re not looking to hurt Iran. I want them to be strong and great and have a great economy... We have no secrets. And they can be very, very strong, financially. They have great potential.”

Then again, Ayatollah Khamenei said: the Americans cannot be trusted, ever.

Pepe Escobar, a veteran Brazilian journalist, is the correspondent-at-large for Hong Kong-based [Asia Times](#). His latest book is [“2030.”](#) Follow him on [Facebook](#).

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