

Why the Tehran regime's warmongering is hastening its own demise?

Iran's proxies in Baghdad continue to consolidate political and military control



BARIA ALAMUDDIN

Iran's leaders knew immediately that one of their missiles had shot down a plane loaded with citizens and foreign nationals, but they did what came naturally – they lied, stonewalled and covered up. All allegations of regime culpability for the deaths of 176 people on board Ukrainian Airlines Flight 752 were “foreign conspiracies.” Confronted with a mountain of irrefutable evidence, they belatedly, begrudgingly acknowledged their “unforgivable mistake” – before retorting that it was all America's fault for stoking tensions.

I am constantly astonished at much of the Western world's pathological predisposition to swallow Iranian lies. Some officials used to parrot the preposterous line that Iran would never use an atomic bomb because Ayatollah Ali Khamenei – a man with the blood of hundreds of thousands on his hands – had declared such a thing to be un-Islamic. When a swarm of armed drones was launched from Iranian territory last September to attack Saudi oil installations, Tehran instructed its Houthi stooges in Yemen to dissemble that they were responsible; all suggestions to the contrary were devilish “foreign conspiracies.”

The latest round of shadow boxing between the US and this compulsively duplicitous regime changes nothing. It is simply a matter of time until the next bout of skirmishes, and then another. Iran's leaders have set the world on a course that – in the absence of a radical change of direction –

can lead only to war, by any one of several paths.

First, experts are warning that by late 2020 Iran could be no more than three months from having a nuclear bomb. This would make military action inevitable if America and Israel fulfil pledges to prevent Iran becoming a nuclear state.

Second, the accumulation of missiles and paramilitaries on Israel's borders with Lebanon and Syria dictates that Tel Aviv will eventually act to neutralise this threat.

Next, Iran's proxies in Baghdad continue to consolidate political and military control. Threats to evict US forces have halted operations against Daesh. Sunnis, Kurds and minorities are more disenchanted than ever, while Shiite areas boil with mass protests; Iraq's continuing disintegration imperils the entire region.

Meanwhile the Syrian conflict grinds on; while Iranian proxies quietly consolidate under the cover of Erdogan's ethnic cleansing of Syria's Kurds, Assad, Hezbollah and Russia continue crushing the life out of Idlib.

Finally, since Iran's attacks in 2019 on Saudi oil installations and shipping in the Gulf, few tangible steps have been taken to reduce Iran-GCC tensions under the shadow of the continuing Yemen conflict.

An Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps commander caused consternation last week by holding a news conference in front of the massed banners of Iran-aligned militias, including Hezbollah, Pakistani and Afghan proxies in Syria, the Houthis and Al-Hashd Al-Shaabi. Iran mendaciously claims that it wants to calm tensions, but instead of distancing itself from militants and terrorists, it literally drapes itself in their flags.



Experts analyse the fragments and remains of the Ukraine International Airlines plane in Iranian capital Tehran.

Iraqi and Lebanese protesters against Iranian meddling are not a handful of middle-class arts students; they include hundreds of thousands of working-class Shiites from traditional strongholds of pro-Iranian sentiment, families who lost sons and nephews fighting with Hezbollah in Syria. This cratering of grassroots support has fundamental implications for how Iran wields its regional influence. Before, pro-Tehran factions were able to win sufficient votes, while also relying on client politicians from Christian, Sunni and other demographics, with Qassem Soleimani bribing and threatening political leaders.

Trump's accumulated barrages of sanctions have only encouraged Tehran to further dig in with its transnational paramilitary strategy. Instead, there must be redoubled muscular diplomatic efforts to block Iranian expansionism in Arab states.

If Iran can no longer count on dominating the ballot box and

Impeaching a US president has never led

Gavin Esler

A little more than 20 years ago, I became a world expert on lies. I spent a whole year of my life on one lie. The lie was: “I did not have sexual relations with that woman, Miss Lewinsky.”

It was told to the American people by Bill Clinton, the then US president.

He also told that lie under oath, and that resulted in his impeachment, the formal process for removing an American head of state.

I was the BBC's chief North America correspondent and member of the White House press corps so I sat through the impeachment process from beginning to end, the most extraordinary political theatre I have ever witnessed.

The only other US president to be impeached was Andrew Johnson in 1868, just after the American civil war.

Impeachment charges are vaguely called “high crimes and misdemeanours”, and it is worth

considering whether lies and even impeachment itself really matter. That is because this week, the third most powerful politician in the US, House of Representatives speaker Nancy Pelosi, is about to begin formal proceedings to impeach Donald Trump, the current incumbent of the White House.

So let me begin with a spoiler alert. Mr Trump may be the second president to be impeached in 25 years and the third in US history but he is very unlikely to be removed from office. Impeaching a US president has never led to removal. Never. So what is the point?

We can predict that this new political theatre will transfix Washington, America and much of the world the way Meghan Markle and Prince Harry have dominated the British media in recent days. The point of an impeachment trial – to be blunt – is not justice or truth. It is politics. What happened to Mr Clinton is instructive because in some ways it is the mirror image of what is happening to Mr Trump.

From the moment he was elect-



It is going to be next to impossible to remove US President Donald Trump from office.

ed in 1992, the Republican Party tried to bring Mr Clinton down. The Republicans won a landslide in Congressional elections in 1994 under Ms Pelosi's predecessor Newt Gingrich and they immediately investigated the Clintons. It was clear to me at the time that

many Republicans simply loathed Bill and Hillary. They still do. The investigation at first focused on the couple's supposed business dealings in what became known as the Whitewater affair. It got nowhere.

However, it was obvious from

the first time I met Mr Clinton in 1991 that he liked the company of women. In 1992, he survived allegations of an affair and in a sense that helped his political career. An obscure governor of the somewhat obscure state of Arkansas was suddenly famous

Donald Trump will almost certainly escape removal from office, like Bill Clinton did two decades ago