

Iran threatened to block Hormuz. Will we now take it seriously?

The Iranian regime appears to have concluded that offence is the best form of defence and is consequently moving towards a war-footing



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Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei in Tehran on June 13, hoping to ease tensions between Iran and the US. When Abe offered to convey an Iranian reply to a message from President Trump, Khamenei declined. Indeed, it appears that Khamenei's reply at that exact moment was already being sent in the form of twin attacks against commercial tankers in the Gulf. A Norwegian-owned ship loaded with petrochemicals erupted into flames. The other targeted ship was carrying Japanese cargo (methanol) in transit to Singapore. Was this a calculated snub to Abe's peace-making efforts?

Although US and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) officials were quick to identify Iran as the likely culprit, it is right to allow a full investigation before definitively apportioning blame. However, experts agree that four previous attacks against oil tankers last month had Iranian fingerprints, and there is only one serious suspect in the frame.

Iran has repeatedly threatened to obstruct commercial shipping in the Strait of Hormuz. Just days ago, in a fire-breathing speech, Hizbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah threatened US forces with "annihilation" and proclaimed that "the entire region will burn ... a barrel of oil will be \$200 or \$300."

Nasrallah's prediction was uncannily accurate, with oil prices rocketing within minutes of the tanker attacks. Even Mohammed Javad Zarif, Iran's usually



Shinzo Abe and Ali Khamenei in Tehran.

mild-mannered foreign minister, recently threatened that the US "cannot expect to stay safe."

How, then, can these cheap mobsters feign outrage about fingers pointing at them when things start blowing up?

Tehran knows that its disintegrating economy cannot withstand a possible six more years of Trump. The regime appears to have concluded that offence is the best form of defence and is consequently moving toward a war-footing. Qassem Soleimani, the Quds Force commander, last

month instructed proxies in Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen to prepare to target Western assets.

The Gulf of Oman attacks came the day after Iranian missiles hit a crowded arrivals hall at Abha airport, in Saudi Arabia's southwest, causing dozens of casualties. The moderate climate of this attractive region makes it a favoured summer destination for Saudi and Gulf holidaymakers. The airport was thus at its busiest. A Houthi spokesman claiming responsibility for the Abha strikes threatened to target all Saudi airports.

Indeed, missiles were fired yadh airport in 2017.

Such provocations are attempts to embroil Middle Eastern states in the conflict. Iran's proxy armies across the region. The prospects for stability would be bleak, in There has been a recent in unrest in Qatif, and it is a matter of time before T stirs the pot again in Bah villages. How long before joins the fray, bringing dow and destruction on Lebanon southwestern Syria?

Bahrain's efforts to host peace summit



SALAH UDDIN SHOAIB CHOUDHURY

The conference aims to bring together government and business leaders from Europe, the Middle East and Asia

During June 25-26, the Kingdom will host one of the most significant events of the year. According to the White House, this conference will bring together government and business leaders from Europe, the Middle East and Asia.

Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Egypt, Morocco, Jordan and few more countries have agreed to attend the unveiling of the economic component of a new US peace plan to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

According to diplomatic analysts, the United States is leading a process of regional economic co-operation for the benefit of the entire Middle East. This includes promoting ties with the pragmatic Arab countries in the region, via security co-operation and joint economic initiatives.

A central part of these efforts is the planned Bahrain 'Peace to Prosperity' economic workshop.

The US administration and Bahrain announced in mid-May that they would host the economic workshop in the Bahraini capital of Manama in late June, and that it "will facilitate discussions on an ambitious, achievable vision and framework for a prosperous future for the Palestinian people and the region".

American officials have said that the meeting will deal with the economic portion of its apparently forthcoming plan to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a plan whose unveiling has been delayed by political instability inside Israel.

Jason D Greenblatt, an assistant to President Donald Trump and special representative for international negotiations said, "This is exciting -- an opportunity of a generation. We are grateful to the Kingdom for extending the invitation to us to host the June 25 and 26 workshop with them for the benefit of Palestinians and others in the region, offering us a unique opportunity to communicate our economic vision".

He said, "The workshop is a pivotal opportunity to convene government, civil society, and business leaders to share ideas, discuss strategies and galvanise



The summit is expected to serve a platform for the international community to support Palestinians, both economically and pol

support for potential economic investments and initiatives that could be made possible by a peace agreement.

"This workshop will facilitate discussions on an ambitious,

achievable vision and framework for a prosperous future for Palestinians, including enhancements to economic governance, development of human capital, and facilitation of rapid private-sector

growth. The results of the discussions could lead to significant investment in the talented Palestinian and regional population. History shows that most national conferences on the