

Megaphone or Megaflop? Trump's media campaign against Iran

By Yuram Abdullah Weiler

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“Trump’s tweets to Iran have been totally incoherent, ranging from pleas [for] dialogue to threats of military attack.”

—Karim Sadjadpour, senior fellow and Iran expert with the Carnegie Endowment.¹

Recently the Islamic Republic of Iran’s Foreign Minister, Dr. Mohammad Javad Zarif, was interviewed by U.S. media during his visit to New York for a United Nation ministers’ conference on sustainable development goals. U.S. secretary of state Mike Pompeo signed off on a visa for Dr. Zarif’s visit, but restricted his travel “in a manner that is fully consistent” with U.S. obligations under the U.N. agreement. The Iranian foreign minister was even accused by an unnamed U.S. official of using the alleged press freedoms “to spread malign propoganda,” calling him “a mouthpiece of an autocracy that suppresses free speech.”²

Having graciously—in his own mind at least— granted a visa for Iran’s foreign minister to travel to New York, Pompeo quickly proposed that he be allowed reciprocal privileges by being given a visa to visit Tehran. “We aren’t afraid of @JZarif coming to America where he enjoys the right to speak freely,” Pompeo pontificated on Twitter. “Are the facts of the @khamenei_ir regime so bad he cannot let me do the same thing in Tehran?” The former Kansas Tea Party member continued, “What if his people heard the truth, unfiltered, unabridged?”³

In a recent interview on the right-leaning Bloomberg Television, the U.S. secretary of state, when asked about a possible trip to Tehran, reiterated, “Sure, if that’s the call, [I’ll] happily go there.” Apparently overlooking his country’s 40-year history of economic terrorism against the Islamic Republic, Pompeo explained that he would like to go to Tehran “not do propoganda but speak the truth to the Iranian people about what it is their leadership has done and how it has harmed Iran.”⁴ Would Pompeo’s version of the truth include the numerous breaches of international agreements perpetrated by the United States, exemplified by the recent abrogation by the Washington regime of the JCPOA?

Dr. Zarif has given several interviews with American media organizations during his tenure as the Iran’s Foreign Minister. In a live interview on the CBS News program, “Face the Nation,” in April of 2019, he listed a few of the plethora of unilateral rescindments the U.S. has committed over the years in response to a question posed by the interviewer. When asked if there was no point to having the current American president meet with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, Zarif explained that “there won’t be any point in having them meet unless the United States is willing to show that it is a reliable partner and it has failed to do so.”⁵

Among the defections from its international responsibilities, the United States “has withdrawn from UNESCO. It has withdrawn from NAFTA. It has withdrawn from Trans-Pacific Partnership, TPP. It has withdrawn from the Human Rights Council,” Zarif noted, and that it “recently withdrew from INF.” Later on in the same interview, he pointed out that it was the United States that left the JCPOA, not Iran, and, as a result of this irresponsible act, “the United States has harmed a lot of people.”⁶

Most damaging to the self-assessed image of the U.S. was the Foreign Minister's statement of how Iran has played an undeniably crucial role in the fight against ISIS terrorists in Iraq and Syria. "Yesterday, there was a commemoration in Iraq—a U.S. friend and ally—of 300 Iranians who died in Iraq fighting ISIS," he stated, adding pointedly, "I haven't seen them commemorating any martyrs from Saudi Arabia fighting ISIS, or UAE."⁷

In a recent interview on Bloomberg Television, Dr. Zarif explained that Iranian officials have derived a salient lesson from the way the current occupant of the White House renegotiated NAFTA with Mexico. "After renegotiating NAFTA he raised a new demand and he tried to push Mexicans into giving in a bit more," he averred. "So he always believes, it seems, that 'What's mine is mine and what's yours is negotiable'." Putting it in simple language that even a linguistically-challenged U.S. president can understand on the issue of renegotiating, Foreign Minister Zarif emphasized, "You don't buy a horse twice."⁸

Based on the Iranian foreign minister's performances during interviews on U.S. media outlets, it seems likely that the justification for Pompeo's desire to speak to the Iranian people is to counter the soft power victories achieved by his counterpart. In response to Pompeo's interview request, spokesman of the Iranian Government Ali Rabiei remarked, "We announce that Press TV host Marzieh Hashemi can go to interview him to give him the chance to say what he wants to say."⁹ Rabiei's choice of Hashemi as the interviewer is stinging appropriate. When she arrived at St. Louis' Lambert International Airport in January of 2019, she was detained for 10 days by U.S. authorities reportedly for the purpose of being a material witness in a case alleging that her employer was a "propaganda outlet" that had failed to register as a foreign agent.¹⁰

In spite of the incessant "freedom of speech" mantra promulgated by U.S. officials, there are severe restrictions when it comes to criticism of the Israel lobby, the Zionist entity, or the perpetual mistreatment of Palestinians. One such individual, Nader Talebzadeh, the secretary-general of New Horizon, has been added to the sanction list of the U.S. treasury department, whose head, Steve Mnuchin, is a dyed-in-the-wool Zionist with two passports. One of the two disturbing facts that the U.S. is desperately trying to keep under wraps is that a Jewish community has actually requested asylum in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The other is that U.S. officials have conceded that they are worried about Iran's ever-increasing media influence.¹¹

To counter the Islamic Republic's soft power projection capabilities, the U.S. has ramped up its propaganda blitz, dubbed "Trump's Megaphone,"¹² and imposed additional sanctions against Iran's media, including IRIB head Abdol-Ali Ali-Askari, allegedly over censorship and human rights concerns. "Imposing sanctions against the head of the IRIB is a sign that America is extremely angry that the monopoly of the media front of the [global] Arrogance has been shattered," Ali-Askari stated, "and it has been discredited time and again before the public opinion in Iran and the world."¹³

Google, for its part, has deleted a total of 58 YouTube and other online accounts that it claims were tied to the IRIB,¹⁴ based on an investigation by FireEye, a cyber security firm whose mission is "to relentlessly protect our customers from the impact and consequences of cyber attacks."¹⁵ FireEye, incidentally, received its initial funding through CIA front company, In-Q-

Tel in 2009.¹⁶ In its report, “Suspected Iranian Influence Operation,” FireEye claims to have identified “a suspected influence operation that appears to originate from Iran, aimed at audiences in the U.S., U.K., Latin America, and the Middle East.” The purpose of the alleged “influence operation” is to “promote political narratives in line with Iranian interests. These narratives include anti-Saudi, anti-Israeli, and pro-Palestinian themes, as well as support for specific U.S. policies favorable to Iran, such as the U.S.-Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA).”¹⁷

U.S. propaganda efforts against Iran are, of course, not new. Through the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), the U.S. government, in partnership with private organizations and individuals, has been bombarding Iranians with various media with the goal of eventual regime change. While fomenting unrest in numerous countries, the NED has funded the Abdorrahman Boroumand Foundation, a front for the Mujahedin-e Khalq to the tune of \$345,000. Also a recipient was the National Iranian American Council (NIAC), which was the beneficiary of nearly \$200,000 to carry out a “media workshop.” NIAC’s former leader, Trita Parsi, wrote his dissertation under neocon ideologist Francis Fukuyama, who predicted the eventual victory of western liberal democracy. Some \$85 million was allocated to propaganda efforts against Iran during the Bush II regime, which allowed Voice of America’s Farsi service to broadcast 24/7.¹⁸

Meanwhile, the supposed bastion of the free press is rated 48th out of 180 countries by Reporters Without Borders, which states, “Press freedom has continued to decline in the second year of President Donald Trump’s presidency.”¹⁹ While the U.S. has been waging a concerted media war against Iran for decades, Trump’s policies of sanctions and on-again/off-again military threats are failing by uniting the Iranian people against the American threat.²⁰ The totally incoherent Twitter tantrums against Iran blaring forth from “Trump’s megaphone” sound more and more like a megaflop.

Endnotes

¹ Sune Engel Rasmussen and Michael Amon, “U.S. Aims a Megaphone at Iranian Public as Part of Pressure Campaign,” *The Wall Street Journal*, July 25, 2019, accessed July 29, 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-aims-a-megaphone-at-iranian-public-as-part-of-pressure-campaign-11564047001>.

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⁷ *Ibid.*

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¹¹ "Founders of Iranian 'New Horizon' Conference Recently Added to List of Sanctioned Organizations: U.S. Is Worried about Iran's Ideological Influence; Jewish Community Asked for Asylum in Iran," *Middle East Media Research Institute*, February 20, 2019, accessed July 29, 2019, <https://www.memri.org/tv/founders-iranian-sanctioned-conference-talebzadeh-montezami-mnuchin-menachem-neocons-zionists-inside-america-jews/transcript>.

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