Past two weeks saw the US officials moving from first issuing an alert to their military commanders to make plans for a retaliatory strike against Iranian targets to talking about ‘easing’ sanctions on Iran if Iran ‘wants it.’ It’s obvious that there is no reason why the Iranians wouldn’t want to see sanctions against them being eased up. Yet, Trump’s desire for a formal request about this issue shows the latent intention of ignoring it, while using the whole scenario to its advantage i.e., let the situation exacerbate to an extent whereby the Iranian regime becomes unstable and incapable of rescuing its people from the virus, and thus collapse ultimately.

This would surely serve the US interests, along with those of Saudi Arabia and Israel, which have been pushing hard to do a “regime change” in Tehran. In their calculation, the unprecedented crisis caused by the COVID-19 seems to have given them yet another opportunity to attain their ultimate objective.

Indeed, this was the intention when the US asked its military commanders to make plans for a retaliatory strike on Iran in response to an imaginary Iranian attack on the US military bases—an attack that had neither been planned nor was it foreseen by anybody. But the fact that the US was going to ‘directly attack the Iranian forces’ in the wake of Iran supported militias attacking US troops shows that the intention was, as Trump himself said, to “up the food chain”, thus creating a scenario that would be extremely difficult for Tehran to address.

Accordingly, as a part of US ‘war preparations’, the US military officials disclosed, seemingly on purpose, to the
western media that Patriot air defence systems have been deployed to two Iraqi military bases and that the same system were going to be deployed across two more bases.

While manufacturing a military crisis is one thing, executing it is another. Accordingly, even if the US ‘had a plan’, it doesn’t mean it was going to work because of multiple factors, including the lack of support from the US allies in Europe, who were already in the middle of operationalising Instex to start economic and financial transactions with Iran, bypassing the US sanctions and showcasing their ‘independent’ approach towards Iran in the wake of widening gap between the US and Europe/NATO.

But the US sanctions are still intact; for easing sanctions will allow, in the US calculation, the Iranian regime to better tackle the COVID-19 crisis and thus stabilise itself politically and economically. This would thus undermine the very purpose of the US sanctions i.e., forcing the Iranian regime to implode and collapse.

Indeed, a collapse followed by a massive crisis in the Middle East, particularly the one that involves Iran, is something that the US would welcome rather than desist. It shows why the US imposed new sanctions on Iran instead of removing the old ones.

It has happened recently when Iran, out of the necessity to cope with the monetary shortfall, requested 5 billion dollars from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). While this was always obvious that the request will not be granted without the US acquiescence, the US actually responded by announcing new sanctions on Iran’s oil industry, one of its very few remaining foreign exchange earners. The intention was to make life even more difficult for the Iranians.

Also, it explains why Washington has so far taken no serious steps to actually ease the sanctions on its own, even though sufficient conditions for doing so exist undoubtedly, including Iran’s response whereby they called for a halt to “warmongering during the coronavirus outbreak” and further warned that the US military activities could create “instability and disaster”. On April 2, Foreign Minister Javad Zarif, addressing the US president, tweeted that, “Don’t be misled by usual warmongers, AGAIN. Iran starts no wars, but teaches lessons to those who do.”

Notwithstanding the ‘progressive’ US rhetoric about easing sanctions if Iran asks for it, the fact of the matter remains that the US strategic aim in this part of the world remains a “regime change” in Iran, although it is also becoming clear with every day passing that this objective can never be achieved.

Europe has already started Instex, although it is yet to produce productive economic results and engage in economic and financial activity beyond the support for COVID-19. The Chinese have yet again come out against the US war aggression, and the Russians remain a bulwark against any US adventure in the Middle East, particularly against Iran.

None of this, of course, means that the US will end its sanctions. On the other hand, it will continue to add more to the pool as it did a few days ago; after all, ‘Iranian crisis’ is the linchpin of the US military presence in the region and the key source of wealth for its military-industrial complex.

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