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Iran

The White House, “best enemy” of the Islamic Republic

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The assassination of General Ghassem Soleimani by an American drone on 3 January 2020 in Baghdad is undoubtedly another step in the confrontation between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States. The targeted assassination of Soleimani, ordered by Donald Trump himself, took place following a long period of mounting tension between Iran and the United States. This act which can undoubtedly be characterised as state terrorism is of course illegal from the point of view of international law (what would have been said if a Western minister visiting abroad had been liquidated by Iran?).

Since his election to the White House, Donald Trump has continued to increase pressure on the Tehran regime. From the unilateral denunciation of the Vienna agreement on the Iranian nuclear file through to the heavy economic sanctions which suffocate the Iranian economy up to the elimination of Soleimani, Trump has not spared any means to limit Tehran's influence in the region. It must be said that the multiple imperialist interventions carried out since 1991 have strengthened the position of Iran on the regional level. Today, the mullahrchy has significant influence in Yemen, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon.

Ghassem Soleimani led the elite Al Quds force of the Revolutionary Guard corps. As such, he was the man behind the Tehran regime's external interventions, among those close to the Guide of the Revolution, Ali Khamenei. Soleimani received his orders directly from the Guide and reported only to him. He was at the crossroads of all the Middle Eastern networks of the regime and acted as war chief and diplomat.

Soleimani was also the interlocutor for the United States. During the war against Al Qaida and Islamic State in Iraq, Iran and US imperialism had made common cause. With the American command the agreement was tacit. The Shiite militias controlled by Soleimani and the Al Quds forces were engaged in ground operations, the American air force “holding the sky”.

A war criminal, it was Soleimani who organized and actively participated in the crushing of the Syrian revolution. Far from being anti-imperialist, Soleimani and the Islamic Republic have contributed to the development of religious sectarianism in the Middle East, mirroring the Saudi Kingdom, another pillar of reaction in the region. This has done much to stifle the possibilities of popular mobilization in the region, to protect the interests of reactionary states in the Middle East and those of American imperialism.

The assassination of Soleimani is a humiliation for the Mullahrchy. Admittedly, he was replaced immediately, and he will not be missed by the regime as it has a large, sordid reservoir of such individuals. But the Islamic Republic could not fail to react. So far, the regime's response has resulted in 22 missiles being launched at two US bases in Iraq, after notifying the Iraqi government and presumably after the latter informed Washington. The reaction of the Islamic Republic, like that of Trump, shows that there will be no direct military confrontation. The future will tell whether Iran will rely on its regional auxiliaries to carry out an asymmetrical response. The 176 passengers (including many Canadian-Iranian students) of the UIA (Ukraine International Airlines) plane shot down by Iranian ground to air missiles are the only real victims of Trump's criminal adventurism and the “revenge” of the Islamic Republic.

The ranting and calls for revenge from Khamenei and the dignitaries of the regime, the grotesque response against US soldiers in Iraq, the tragic destruction of the UIA plane, the catastrophic management of the consequences of this error, all illustrate the weakness of the Islamic Republic.

Popular mobilizations and repression

This sequence, sparked off by Soleimani’s assassination of Soleimani is at the origin, takes place in an internal context marked by an unprecedented social and economic crisis and by a succession of mobilisations and popular revolts severely repressed by the government and its armed wing, the Guardians of the Revolution.

The threefold increase in the price of gasoline announced by the government on 15 November 2019 had already set fire to the powder trail. Bloody riots had broken out in a hundred cities, large and medium. Several hundred thousand demonstrators had mobilized (200,000 according to the regime). The repression has led to 10,000 arrests, more than 600 wounded and nearly 400 dead.

The regime had to face offensive actions in the form of riots. Indeed, people did not hesitate to destroy giant portraits of Khomeini and Khamenei, to burn down banks, supermarkets, town halls and official buildings, Basij and police vehicles, and even petrol pumps. The authorities succeeded once again in suppressing the popular revolt in blood, but the scale of the crisis, the staggering rise in prices, the massive unemployment of young people and the rampant misery herald further explosions of anger which will be more radical and more violent.

The regime took advantage of Soleimani’s death to try to unite the population around its leaders and around the Islamic Republic. Calls for national unity followed one another. The organization of the funeral for Soleimani, whose body crossed the country and mainly the cities which had been the epicentres of the popular revolt last November, testifies to this attempt. The Guide to the Revolution, Ali Khamenei even personally led the preaching of the Friday prayer that followed the death of Soleimani. It hadn’t happened in eight years.

The Tehran regime, faced with a powerful popular protest in November 2019, clearly sought to use this episode to its advantage. The will of the government is once again to stifle any dispute and to denounce those who fight against it as being in the pay of the United States, Saudi Arabia and Israel. In this, American imperialism once again rendered a great service to the Mullahrchy. In short, the White House remains the “best enemy” of the Islamic Republic.

The destruction of the UIA flight and lies at the highest levels of the regime tainted this communication operation. After trying to hide the evidence, the general of the Guardians of the Revolution in charge of aerospace forces himself confessed to the error of his men, indicating that his superiors were aware of it from the start of the drama. The body of Revolutionary Guards is accountable only to the Guide, the highest figure in the state. The latter, like President Hassan Rohani and the country’s main leaders, for several days denied the regime’s involvement in the tragedy of the 176 passengers and their families.

The anger of the student youth, some of whom identified with the passengers on the UIA flight, broke out even as the regime attempted to impose a completely fake national unity. The demonstrations and actions carried out in particular by students and young people following the destruction of the UIA plane targeted the Guide and the Guardians of the Revolution, and all the institutions of the Islamic Republic. Slogans which are increasingly hostile to the regime and the Guide are now launched at every opportunity and every mobilization, despite the fierce repression that is taking place. The legitimacy of the Islamic Republic is disputed and only the violence of the repression allows the regime to survive.

The regime knows that communications operations alone will not extinguish the embers of the protest or resolve the violent social and economic crisis which the country is going through. We can even note the acceleration of the rate at which popular mobilizations develop. The previous ones took place in December 2017-January 2018.

Common features between the revolt of November 2019 and the previous one: riots are now breaking out in what

used to be bastions of the Islamic Republic. The epicentre is no longer in Tehran, as it may have been during the 2009 protests against the fraudulent re-election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The violence of the crisis pushes impoverished workers, young people and the unemployed to revolt and it is the provincial cities which are on the front line, including very pious cities like the Holy City of Mashhad. The geography of the dispute indicates that the Islamic Republic is losing its social base. Under the effect of sanctions, Iran sells only 300,000 barrels of oil per day against 2.3 million in 2018. The layers usually loyal to the regime no longer even benefit from the clientelist redistribution that allowed them to cope.

Multiple indicators testify to the scale of the crisis and the desperation that is afflicting a growing part of the population. According to the Iranian Ministry of Health, the suicide rate increased by around 100,000 cases between 2018 and 2019. The suicide rate in Iran is higher in the western provinces, where unemployment rates are also the most significant. According to the person responsible for the suicide prevention program at the Ministry of Health, the main causes of the high suicide rate are “an unstable environment, poverty and unemployment”. Young people, women and the poorest strata are the main victims of the lack of prospects. Thus, 75% of suicide attempts are by 15 to 34 year olds. Statistics extracted from Iran’s health ministry data show that Iran has the highest suicide rate of women and girls in the Middle East.

On the social level, the balance sheet of the regime's economic policy combined with international sanctions is terrible. Since 2016, the Iranian currency has lost 90% of its value against the dollar. The collapse has led to very high inflation through the cost of imports, rising production costs and the bankruptcy of several hundred companies. According to the Iranian Centre for Statistics, inflation is estimated to be around 50%. All of this has resulted in an explosion in unemployment and poverty. Over 40% of employees have a standard of living that is below the poverty line. Child labour is on the rise: almost seven million children are forced to work. Finally, the disastrous management of water resources has exacerbated the drought and accelerated the mass exodus of the rural population, and the development of slums around the country's major cities. Eleven million people live in these slums.

The virulence of the effects of the crisis, the severity of the economic sanctions, the corruption of the dignitaries of the regime and the Guardians of the Revolution who have greatly enriched themselves, the privatization of whole swathes of the country's economy for the benefit of the ruling clans and leaders of the Guardians of the Revolution, the political, social and repressive violence of the regime, all serve to explain the massive popular rejection.

Widespread challenge to the plan

Popular protest today targets the entire regime, its internal and foreign policies. Increasingly, the regional policy of the Islamic Republic is contested by the people. Billions of dollars are spent to support militias in Iraq or Syria, to finance Hezbollah in Lebanon or the pro-Iranian factions in Yemen. The regime's military budget is exploding. This policy claims to protect the country from external enemies and to wage war elsewhere than in Iran. It is true that the regional panorama shows entire countries devastated and dismembered by decades of imperialist intervention. Afghanistan underwent the Soviet invasion then the power of the warlords supported by the United States, the reactionary Saudi or kingdom or the constant interference of the Pakistani regime and to a lesser extent of the Islamic Republic, the reign of the Taliban then the American invasion following the September 11 attacks. Today, the Taliban are poised to return to power with the blessing of the Trump administration. Meanwhile, the people of Afghanistan see no way out of their plight.

The Iraqi people have experienced eight years of deadly war against Iran, a destructive intervention by the United States following the invasion of Kuwait by the dictator Saddam Hussein in 1991, a criminal embargo imposed by the imperialist powers, a new war in 2003 waged by US imperialism, the violence of Al Qaida and Islamic State, the war

against the latter led by the United States and Iran... The country is now drained of blood and carved up by the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Besides, the Iraqi population in revolt now demands the departure of the troops of the American and Iranian occupations.

In Syria, the crushing of the revolution by the bloodthirsty regime of Bashar al-Assad, Putin's Russia, Iran, Lebanese Hezbollah on the one hand, and the violence of Daesh and fundamentalist and sectarian Sunni groups supported through Saudi Arabia, the military interventions of Turkey and the United States on the other, have made the country a vast field of ruin. As for Yemen, Riyadh and Tehran collide indirectly and plunge the country into endless agony in a complicit international silence. Everywhere the interventions and interferences of the imperialist powers and of the regional powers have led to disaster.

The map of US military bases in the region is impressive and meaningful. The Persian Gulf region is of major strategic interest to the major capitalist powers. In the rivalries which oppose the United States to China or Russia, the control of hydrocarbons and the seaways which allow their trade represents a primordial stake. As a result, Washington's policy is crystal clear. It consists of relying on allied states (such as Saudi Arabia or the Israeli colonial state) to defend its military presence in the region. States and countries that do not fully align with the geostrategic interests of the United States have been destroyed by successive imperialist interventions or turned into a war zone by interposed forces.

A large part of the Iranian population is aware of the regional environment and the threats facing the country. That being said, the staggering expenditure on the nuclear or ballistic program is pointed to by the population and the misappropriation of wealth and oil rent in favour of interference in the countries of the region is today massively rejected by the Iranians. This rejection is also expressed in Lebanon, Iraq and everywhere where the peoples of the region have the capacity to express themselves. The rejection of the Islamic Republic must be accompanied by the same opposition to imperialist interference and intervention.

As such, the Iranian and international revolutionary left has the responsibility to take its place in the social struggles in Iran, to popularize democratic and workers' demands, to defend those who fight for the overthrow of the Islamic Republic, for freedom, equality and social justice and who oppose imperialism. Contrary to Trump's claims, the United States does not stand alongside the Iranian people. The economic sanctions imposed only benefit the clans that share power in Iran and, first and foremost, the Revolutionary Guards who control the black market and illegal imports. They get rich while the population sinks into misery. Trump is their best ally.

In the revolts that will surely break out with more virulence, currents funded by Washington or Riyadh will try to impose their agenda. Certain currents from the seraglio of the Islamic Republic, the monarchists or the Mojahedin-e Khalq, will try to weigh on the course of events to impose a “compromise” with the USA. The experience of the Syrian Kurds has shown once again that there can be no compromise with imperialism. It is necessary to build an independent position based on class struggle and anti-imperialism in Iran and in the region.

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