

Iran sold its soul to the devil, not just America



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As Iran celebrated the 39th anniversary of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's revolution, which installed the region's most brutal Islamist regime into power, its most notorious general, Qassem Soleimani, decided to do more to further the cause of conflict rather than peace.

Soleimani said Saudi Arabia and its allies had "sold everything they have to America," suggesting Arab regimes had sold their souls to the United States.

Surely those who live in glass houses ought to not throw rocks. Look at Iran's record collaborating with Western powers and sowing suffering and misery across the Middle East.

Soleimani, the commander of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' al-Quds Force, claimed the regime he serves had achieved victory in the region, saying Tehran "uprooted the Ba'ath [in Iraq]... and defeated the Islamic State [ISIS]."

Ironic, then, that it is Iran that is propping up the Syrian Ba'ath regime of Bashar Assad, which is openly using chemical weapons against its civilian population and has an ideology that Khomeini described as "heretical."

Without Iranian sponsorship of fundamentalist Shia Islamist sectarianism in Iraq, ISIS would not have been the threat that it has been over the past four years.

Staying in the tragedy of Syria, does Soleimani not find it absurd that he and his force of US-listed terrorists are working hand in glove with a resurgent Russia? Tehran's mullahs have berated every government in the region for working with "imperialists," yet see no problem with assisting Russia, a country that once colonised parts of Iran, to carve up and eviscerate the Syrian people.



Many faces of the problem. Iraqis hold portraits of Houthi rebels' leader Abdulmalik al-Houthi (R) and Commander of Iran's al-Quds Force Qassem Soleimani during a rally in Baghdad. (AFP)

Soleimani also conveniently forgot just how much of that deplorable American airpower he and his sectarian Shia jihadists needed to turn the tide against ISIS, an enemy with no airpower or significant heavy armoured units.

Imagine the scene: The so-called sworn enemy of the United States, the Islamic Republic of Iran and its horde of hardcore Shia Islamist militants who carry out the decree of Allah on Earth advancing under the air cover of the "Great Satan" itself. Were it not for the war crimes, crimes against humanity and tremendous loss of civilian life in Iraq because of this most unholy alliance, it would be hilarious for its sheer hypocrisy.

In case anyone wanted to argue that Iran is acting pragmatically and making necessary and temporary alliances of convenience in a highly complicated modern strategic environment, this is not the first time since Khomeini's republic was founded that it has worked with Washington and its allies.

In its infant years and during the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war, Tehran cut deals with not only the United States but with a country that it has incessantly reminded us needs to be wiped off the face of the Earth – Israel. In the infamous Irangate scandal that rocked the Reagan administration, Iran received weapons from Israel while the United States resupplied the Israelis and

received payments from them.

All of this is quite apart from Iran's active assistance in the United States' global war on terror and the dual disastrous invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. A casual look behind the curtain of Iranian propaganda reveals the ugly hypocrisy lurking in the shadows.

Iran is in no position to be taking Saudi Arabia and its allies to task over working with Washington when Tehran itself has a storied history of collaborating with a country it makes a song and dance about opposing but spends its time trying to ingratiate itself to.

Soleimani had better take a long, hard look in the mirror before blasting his regional opponents.

“A casual look behind the curtain of Iranian propaganda reveals the ugly hypocrisy lurking in the shadows.”

Violence against Sufis reflects intolerance of Islamic Republic



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Read riots, hijab protests and now Sufi skirmishes. Individually, they don't threaten Iran's leaders but, occurring in consecutive waves, they appear to erode the foundations of the country. Iran comes across as either unwilling or incapable of providing bread, personal or spiritual freedom to its citizens.

The latest round of unrest in Tehran began February 19 when uniformed officers of the Law Enforcement Forces (NAJA) surrounded the house of Nour-Ali Tabandeh, 90, the Qutb – spiritual leader – of the Sufis of the Gonabadi order. It is the largest Sufi order in Iran and the Qutb's devout followers from all over the country rushed to the rescue of their leader, who they feared could be arrested by police.

In the ensuing skirmishes, the police indiscriminately attacked people near Tabandeh's residence. Horrific video footage of hospitalised men and women of all ages circulated in the Persian-language blogosphere. Tabandeh remains in his house but 300 of his followers were arrested by the police and remain incarcerated at Evin, Fashafouyeh and Qarchak prisons.

Three riot police were killed when a bus was driven into their ranks. A member of the Basij, which is one of the five forces of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, was run over by a car. Another was stabbed.

This accelerated the government

propaganda machinery's virulent attacks against the Sufis. The Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting, which previously referred to the Sufis as "a deviant sect" is using the derogatory term "Darvish-e Daeshi" – "Islamic State Sufis." Kayhan, a conservative newspaper in Tehran, calls them "Satanist" and various other authorities accuse the Sufis of criminal acts as diverse as "car theft" and "raping women" to "freemasonry" and "acting as the lackeys of foreign enemies."

One of the few government officials deviating from the hateful chorus against the Sufis is Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli. In support of the Sufis, he said: "We consider the dervish currents in the country as a wise, rational and balanced current."

Iran has a tumultuous history in dealing with the Sufis, suppressing them with various degrees of violence, which peaked during the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

In January 2006, authorities bulldozed the hussainiya (congregation hall) of the Gonabadi order in Qom, provoking large protests. More than 1,000 Sufis were arrested and 200 people, including the Qom deputy police chief, were wounded in the skirmishes. Grand Ayatollah Hussein-Ali Montazeri, then one of the country's most senior clerics, who was under house arrest in Qom, and Mehdi Karroubi, at the time chairman of the National Trust Party, declared support for the Sufis but in vain.



Apolitical current. Nour-Ali Tabandeh, the spiritual leader of the Sufis of the Gonabadi order. (Twitter)

Other Gonabadi hussainiyas were bulldozed in Tehran and Isfahan in 2007 and 2008, each time provoking large protests and leading to the arrest of followers. This, despite the Sufis being one of the country's most peaceful communities.

Why does the Tehran regime provoke conflict with peaceful and largely apolitical Sufi orders?

Why doesn't it tolerate them instead?

Why radicalise a group of believers?

The answer has much to do with the nature of the Islamic Republic

of Iran. It does not tolerate the existence of non-governmental organisations or interpretations of religion that aren't sanctioned by the government. The very existence of charismatic leaders such as Tabandeh provides an alternative to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. This is intolerable to the regime.

The Sufis, in a February 23, 2014, open letter to Iranian President Hassan Rohani warned: "Don't transform [our] shouts [for justice] into hatred." There is little indication the regime is listening.

“Why does the regime provoke conflict with peaceful and largely apolitical Sufi orders? Why doesn't it tolerate them instead? Why radicalise a group of believers?”