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The competition between Iran and United States over Iraq

Zaher Baher

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On 27th December, a US base near Kirkuk came under attack, killing a US contractor and injuring US and Iraqi soldiers. The US claimed that the attack was launched by a Shia militia group, Kata'ib Hizbullah (KH) pro-Iranian.

On Sunday 29th December, the US retaliated by airstrike against five KH bases, three of them in Iraq and the rest in Syria. The KH confirmed 19 of its fighters were killed and 35 more were injured. The chief of Hashd al-Shaabi, (Popular Mobilization Forces) soon after that announced "The blood of the martyrs will not be in vain and our response will be very tough on the American forces in Iraq."

On 31st December, a huge protest organised by the pro-Iranian militia and their supporters to storm the American compound violently and chanted slogan "No, no, America!" and "No, no, Trump!", and "Death to America!" The protests are still on and the Iraqi security allowed some of the protesters inside the highly protected Green Zone. The same security who has brutally suppressed the protesters in Tahrir Square in Baghdad and other cities, now

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allowed the protesters and the supporters of pro-Iranian militias stood by and watched molotov cocktails thrown at the US embassy. The Kurdish media claimed nobody was inside the compound, all of the staff were evacuated the night before to the city of Erbil, the capital of Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). But the US denounced this news as rumours.

What is happening now between Iran and US, is not war, I believe there is a tiny possibility of war happening between these two.

The conflict between Iran and US is the failure of US foreign policies that failed on the hand of Iranian regime in the Middle East region. It has been proven that the US policies not just in Syria, Iraq, the region as a whole has failed; as well as in Afghanistan and Libya.

What happened now can go on as long as the current regime in Iran exists, it is difficult for the US to achieve its aims in the region especially in Syria and Iraq. Iran knows how to play the games with US.

Donald Trump's war polices with Iran, North Korea and Russia over disputed countries or interests are not on the table. Trump is not as naive as the Western media portrays him. He is smart and frank with his approach. He considers at least three factors in war with Iran:

First, the war against Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya were unsuccessful, costed the US a huge amount of money; resulting in large number of US soldiers killed in action, injured and or leading to disablement. He also knows his war with Iran is unwinnable; it will be even harder than the war on Afghanistan and Iraq. Moreover, there is a great possibility that the war will spread over the whole of the region. He is not sure that he can win the war.

Secondly, he knows well that the American people still have bad memories about wars and do not want another war.

Thirdly, the presidential election is coming up this year, while there is possibility for him to win; he is not that stupid to spoil his chances.

As for the Iranian, they cleverly studied Trump's mentality and his foreign policies. They know Trump does not want war with them, but they also do not want Iraq to be dominated by the US in fear that Iraq will be out of their control. This is the reason that the Iranian from time to time directly or indirectly launches a kind of military operation against US or its allies. In the meantime, Iran is ready to protect the Iraqi regime at any cost.

What is happening in Iraq now, is in the interest of Iran rather than the US. But in the end it is the Iraqi people who pays the price. Iran knows that the American's hands are tied to certain extent. This makes it difficult for the US to force Iran to implement certain conditions set by them. In reality the US cannot stop Iran from its current behaviour. Iran also knows in this conflict brings about couple of important issues. 1st creating a big gap between the Iraqi regime and the US wider and wider. At the same time Iran is testing its power and influences among its pro-militias and other supports. If this situation goes on, it can sharpen the dispute between Iraq and the US, it will become a real issue. Iraq cannot remain neutral indefinitely between Iran and the US as it claims now. The US won't be happy to see the Iraqi securities allowing the pro-Iranian and its supporters on the streets and in Iraqi parliament and inside its force do what they are doing against American embassy. So Iraq has no choice, but to clarify its position whether to stay with Iran or support the US. In my opinion if the situation reaches that level Iraq will support Iran against US.

2nd if this situation continues, it will affect the protesters in Baghdad and other cities who have already paid a very heavy price so far. Over 552 people have been killed, 21,000 injured, 25,000 detained; additionally, many more activists have been abducted.

In this situation the protesters will have no choice as they do not want to be a part of either side, but to leave their trenches and the places they already occupied.

This competition between Iran and US over Iraq cannot go on and on, it must be resolved sooner or later but at the moment it is difficult for us to predict when and how.