

Pompeo's Iran claims

A maximum pressure campaign against the Biden administration?



TASNEEM TAYEB

A CLOSER LOOK
A desperate Mike Pompeo unconvincingly claiming, "Al-Qaeda has a new home base. It is the Islamic Republic of Iran," in a recent speech at the US National Press Club, looks like a frantic last-ditch attempt by the outgoing US administration to further botch up USA's relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran. And the fact that the US Secretary of State could not substantiate the claims only reveal their hollow, fickle base.

This is not the first time, however, the hawkish US diplomat claimed that Iran was forming an axis of evil with Al Qaeda. These last few years, Pompeo has been propagating strong, but unsubstantiated anti-Iran narratives while driving the Trump administration's "Israel First" Middle East policy.

Even in April 2019—nearly 11 months after the US unilaterally pulled out of a multilateral landmark nuclear deal with Iran to curb its nuclear ambitions—Pompeo, during testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, claimed that, "There is no doubt there is a connection between the Islamic Republic of Iran and al-Qaeda. Period. Full stop. The factual question with respect to Iran's connections to al Qaeda is very real. They have hosted al Qaeda. They have permitted al-Qaeda to transit their country." And just like now, back then Pompeo couldn't back these claims with evidence.

In reaction to Pompeo's 2019 statement, a senior US official closely monitoring Iran said, "The Secretary has blown the level of collusion between Iran and a few of the remnants of al Qaeda way out of proportion. There have been occasional marriages

of convenience, but there is nothing in the intelligence to suggest that any of them has been consummated in any grand anti-American alliance."

While there have been instances where some Al Qaeda members have crossed into Iran since the 2001 US strikes, thanks partly to the porous border Iran and Afghanistan share, and have been living in Iran, at times under "house arrest", as suggested by Daniel Benjamin, Obama Administration's State Department top counterterrorism official, there has been no evidence that Iran has colluded with Al Qaeda.

And there could be a number of reasons why Iran has allowed the Al Qaeda members to stay in the country. One reason could perhaps be to hold them hostage to have an upper hand in negotiation with the US or other hostile foreign or regional powers. Another reason could be to make sure that Al Qaeda does not carry out any attacks against Iran or Iranian interests inside or outside the country. "The Iranians want to know what AQ is up to and they keep close tabs on them, but Iran's current approach and one it's maintained for many years has been to avoid anything that would provoke an American strike," Daniel Benjamin was quoted by TIME.

But the question remains, with less than two weeks in the White House, is Pompeo's exaggerated and forced claims about Iran colluding with Al Qaeda only aimed at further straining the relationship between the Iran and the US? Or is there a more sinister motivation behind it?

According to the 2001 Authorisation of Use of Military Force (AUMF), the US forces are allowed to strike on Al Qaeda anywhere in the world, and this means that the US can carry out attacks in Iran, if the country shelters Al Qaeda. The AUMF authorises the president to use force "against those nations, organisations, or persons he determines planned, authorised, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred

on September 11, 2001, or harboured such organisations or persons."

Pompeo's claim would potentially allow the warmongering US to go against a US Congress resolution passed last year that state the president would require authorisation from Congress before attacking Iran. This resolution was passed by the US Congress in the wake of the unlawful and reckless assassination of top Iranian general,

concern that Pompeo's statement has created a "casus belli that would allow the administration to go and attack Iran in its last couple of days in power."

Pompeo's assertion can have dangerous and ever disastrous consequences for the US and the Middle East. Dangerous for the Middle East because this could push the already volatile region on the brink of massive destruction—any war with

Iran Nuclear Deal, would be a blow to the ego and reputation of the outgoing administration, and would not serve their "Israel First" Middle East policy.

One must also keep in mind that the hard-line ideological oppositions between the Shiite Islam based clerical state of Iran and the stanchly Sunni terrorist outfit Al Qaeda, whose religious sentiments are more aligned with the Saudis—one of Iran's greatest regional foes—make any alliance between the two almost impossible. And Iran had in the past detained and deported members of Al Qaeda who had crossed the border and entered Iran, as claimed in 2018 by foreign ministry spokesman Bahram Ghasemi.

And there have been records of Iran siding against the Al Qaeda even before 9/11. A Foreign Policy report suggests that before September 2011, Iran had backed US allies, Northern Alliance Afghan guerrillas who were active against the Taliban, hosts of Al Qaeda. And post 9/11, Iran has been reported to have placed under house arrest several Al Qaeda members who had made it to the country. In light of the decades of animosity and seemingly irreconcilable ideological differences between Iran and Al Qaeda, Pompeo's claims ring hollow to say the least.

To sum it up, the Trump administration seems fully bent on making sure the Biden administration does not get much room to resolve the disputes with Iran, as this would mean a reversal of the mess Trump and company has made in the region and would go against their agenda of putting Israel first. And to this end, the outgoing administration is running a "maximum pressure" campaign against Biden and his cabinet, through their unfounded rhetoric.

How much of this pressure the Biden administration will be able to handle, only time will tell.

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US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo alleges an Iranian alliance with Al-Qaeda in a speech at the National Press Club. PHOTO: ANDREW HARNIK/AFP

Qassem Soleimani, who was the head of Iran's elite Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' (IRGC) Quds Force, and had been instrumental in the defeat of ISIS in Syria and Iran—a fact often downplayed by the western media. In fact, it was Soleimani who officially declared the defeat of IS in Syria and Iraq through a letter to Iranian Supreme Leader, Sayyid Ali Hosseini Khamenei in November 2017.

Trump vetoed the Congress resolution in May 2020.

Talking to the German broadcaster Deutsche Welle, Trita Parsi, executive vice president of the Quincy Institute think tank, rightly expressed the

Iran would potentially embroil the entire region in an uncontrollable mayhem. And disastrous for the US and also Israel because this would also essentially hamper the Trump administration's initiative to force Arab nations to "normalise" ties with Israel.

However, Pompeo's unverified last-minute claim, "I would say Iran is indeed the new Afghanistan—as the key geographic hub for al-Qaeda—but it's actually worse" seems more directed at sabotaging the US-Iran relationship, since the Biden administration salvaging ties with Iran, or going back to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), also known as the

A city in peril, but these palm trees are mine



NIZAMUDDIN AHMED

NO centuries-old city merits a revamping makeup, so as to render it unrecognisable by distortion, not the least Dhaka.

Seemingly unbeknownst to government city planners, architects and engineers, and phoren consultants, irrespective of the lure of flying rail and new avenues, albeit laced with modernity, the places in a city, carved by buildings and spaces, trees and shades, tar and water, are the sworn property of the user people.

The memoirs and myths, the triumphs and tragedies, the fables and folks that make a place, that is our 400-plus year old city—they belong to its respectable citizens, legends and mavericks, beggars and bureaucrats, and all. The cosmopolitan question is, are we considered respectable, enough?

Stagnant icons of a city are the silent guardian angels, who not only transcend over, but bind a place to its people. Complimentary as they are to each other in defining a city, one does all the movement to cause a city to pulsate, while the other by character remains the stage for the drama.

I quote from my book, *Kishore Biswa Sthapatya* (Bangla Academy, 2000), "There lies the appeal of architecture. It may seem to have stopped, actually it is moving."

You do not need to highlight Greek Architect Konstantinos Doxiadis (1913-1975) to understand the significance

of TSC. You do not have to know what the acronym stands for to stand up for it. Teacher-Student Centre became the socio-cultural-politico of not only the University of Dhaka but the country six decades ago. That is sufficient to make it a beloved symbol of the city.

The porter, the traveller, at the Kamlapur Railway Station do not know a pendentive from a pointed arch, but they own every curve that forms the

We do not recall Gustav every time we recall that Eiffel is the most famous tower. How many of us reflect on the architect of Burj Al Khalifa while being awed by the Dubai landmark across the creek? I did not inquire about the architect of 101 while almost breaking my neck to have a view of the top from close. That is how architects put their everlasting autograph on the sands of time.

Boughey's Railway Station under their own terms, as much as we identify with Kahn's Sangsad Bhaban, Curzon Hall and the Mogul remains. You do not rob people of their emotional attachments. That is criminal.

A city is not under threat by black bombers dropping from the sky. The uncultured heart is a much greater destructive force because of forces that are insensitive. Where do you want to stop? Are the Curzon Hall and the Old High Court building threatened to extinction too? Don't forget to enlist Lalbagh Fort and Ahsan Manzil. Such eyesores and waste of space!

Doxiadis floated the philosophy of "ekistics" 20 years before TSC in realising that there is a need for harmony between the inhabitants of a settlement and their physical and sociocultural environments. Ironic that he is poised to be humiliated by a nation he honoured.

Greedy and senselessness, powered by capitalistic market, not in the best interests of society, has led to Old Dhaka going to the dogs, making it faceless and bald of its past heritage. Now, by mindless bureaucratic direction, abetted by shackled building professionals, we have arrived at the coastline of an uncalled for urban disaster.

Instead of destroying the richness of the past, we should be wise to preserve our identity, any self-respecting nation does. Through integration of values enshrined in our people and society, education and literature, art and culture, land and buildings, we remain historically correct, emotionally content, and attain globally respect. Contempt for tradition is suicidal at best.

After 60 years, and an independent country thriving with mega projects, we have the wisdom and the funds, coupled with pluck, to make several hubs for students and faculty all over the country. Why bulldoze what represents the life of thousands of successful students? Dhaka University, how much they are involved in the decision-making I am not certain, should seek land for another campus. Now you are (say) 40 thousand, what happens when you grow two-fold or more? Destroy the one that will be built now?

Some of the most prestigious buildings of major cities are railway stations. Kolkata's Howrah (1854), Gare du Nord in Paris (1866), London St Pancras (1868), New York Grand Central (1913), Tokyo Station (1914), Mumbai Central (1930), and so many others, they are all alive and well. Over centuries, those cities have through massive expansion and development, going aerial and underground, but never ever having any urge to destroy their pride in history and institution. That is edification as opposed to lunacy.

As an integral part of development, by all means we should expand the metropolis railway network, go underground, and over. Build towers and castles, mega structures, if you will. But, for the sake of saving our distinctive antiquity, leave the 1960s' TSC alone, and don't you dare touch the Kamlapur Railway Station, bypass it. This city is in peril, but these palm trees are mine.

Nizamuddin Ahmed is a practising Architect, a Commonwealth Scholar and a Fellow, a Baden-Powell Fellow Scout Leader, and a Major Donor Rotarian.



Teacher-Student Centre became the socio-cultural-politico of not only the University of Dhaka but the country six decades ago. PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

shading roof, each concrete prop that holds up the protective canopy. Most of you never heard of the American Architect Robert Boughey, nor of his preceding compatriot Daniel Dunham, and perhaps never interpreted the awning as having derived from Mogul pointed arches. Yet, since 1968, very few have not marvelled in its spatial glory.

When an architect gifts a city or a landscape his creative genius, he then steps back to move on, for the edifice then belongs to the people. Falling in love innocently through gradual recognition, association, shared memories, joy and sorrow, people grow to assume ownership of an architectural masterpiece.

Every citizen is the owner of TSC and

ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY

JANUARY 17, 1893
Hawaiian monarchy overthrown

Acting for Hawaiian sugar interests and their American allies, a committee led by Sanford Ballard Dole deposed Hawaiian Queen Liliuokalani this day in 1893 and installed a provisional government with Dole as president.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Pack down
- 5 Justice Antonin
- 11 Poet Khayyam
- 12 Sources of bile
- 13 Rudder part
- 14 Some marbles
- 15 Not fleshed out
- 17 Objective
- 18 Like some numerals
- 22 Placates
- 24 Herpetology subject
- 25 Boxing great
- 26 Young fox
- 27 Elbows on the table
- 30 Some tournaments
- 32 Victorious
- 33 In the style of

DOWN

- 1 Stocking stuffers
- 2 Wild
- 3 Prepare to go shopping
- 4 Early round, for short
- 5 Blinds piece
- 6 Cuban exports
- 7 Arthurian island
- 8 Rented out
- 9 Hot blood
- 10 Cart puller
- 16 Print units
- 19 Prepare to punch
- 20 Related
- 21 Brooklyn team
- 22 Mob boss
- 23 Arkin or Alda
- 28 Bald spot cover
- 29 Orchard crop
- 30 Lifeboat need
- 31 City squares
- 35 Body shop challenge
- 36 Dog from Kansas
- 37 Ginger cookie
- 38 Young lion
- 39 – roll (doing well)
- 40 Naval initials

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

Z	E	T	A	Q	U	I	N	O	A
O	R	A	L	U	N	D	E	A	D
O	G	R	E	O	I	L	E	R	S
S	O	N	M	I	C	E	S		
R	E	S	E	T	F	L	A	R	E
A	C	H	E	F	J	A	R	I	A
T	H	E	F	T	J	U	N	K	S
S	O	D	H	E	I	D	I		
B	O	G	A	R	T	W	H	I	P
A	V	A	T	A	R	H	E	L	P
G	A	L	A	X	Y	O	D	E	S

BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

I GOT SARGE A PLANT FOR HIS DESK

CAREFUL, IT'S PRICKLY

THE CACTUS? OR SARGE?

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

ARE WE GOING TO LET THE KIDS TRICK-OR-TREAT ON SATURDAY?

I THINK WE JUST HAVE TO CALL IT OFF THIS YEAR.

OH, MAN.

BUT I BOUGHT A FEW BAGS OF CANDY ANYWAY.

HAVE I TOLD YOU I LOVE YOU?