



“This Is an Asymmetric War Iran Has Prepared for Decades” — Interview with Alastair Crooke (Part I)

According to the former British diplomat, who has extensive experience in the region, the prejudiced West assumed that Iran lacked modern technology.

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Alastair Crooke is one of the most influential figures in the analysis of relations between the West and the Islamic world. A former British diplomat and high-ranking MI6 officer, Crooke is not merely a geopolitical analyst but has been an active participant in the field for many years. His political significance is measured by the crucial role he played in mediating conflicts in Northern Ireland, South Africa and, above all, in the Middle East.

As an adviser to Javier Solana, **High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy** in the European Union (1997–2003), Crooke facilitated direct dialogue with movements such as Hamas and Hezbollah, arguing that sustainable peace requires recognition of and engagement with actors who enjoy popular legitimacy, regardless of how they are labelled by Western capitals.

Crooke is also the founder and director of the *Conflicts Forum* in Beirut, which analyses geo-politics & geo-financial shifts, with a focus on West Asia -, and the author of the excellent book **‘Resistance: The Essence of the Islamist Revolution’**. In this work, Crooke argues that the Islamic revolution was not merely another political movement of the 20th century, but a profound rejection of Western liberal materialism in search of an authentic spiritual and communal identity.

In a lengthy Zoom conversation on March 29, conducted by Marco Fernandes for Brasil de Fato, Alastair Crooke, speaking from his home in Italy, not only provides a precise analysis of the current dynamics of the war that the US and Israel have provoked against Iran and of possible shifts in the balance of power in regional and global geopolitics and economics, but also offers us profound reflections on the development of the Islamic revolution, some of its most significant advances, as well as the challenges for the coming years.

With permission of Brasil de Fato, we are publishing the transcript in three parts. In this first instalment, Crooke examines Iran’s military strategy, reports the grave internal situation in Israel, outlines possible scenarios for the Shia reaction in the region, and analyses the likely involvement of China and Russia in the conflict, which may be helping to consolidate a powerful anti-imperialist alliance, long feared by the US *Deep State*.

According to Crooke, Iran has learned crucial lessons from the US invasion of Iraq (2003), which explains much of its military success to date. For example, if “we cannot have an air force capable of challenging Israel or the United States, (...) what do we do? (...) we should not create an air force. (...) Missiles can become the Iranian air force”.

Similarly, to resist US satellite and intelligence supremacy, “you do not leave your entire military structure in plain sight to be bombed (...) what you must do is (...) bury it deep”, for which Iran initially received assistance from the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. Finally, the creation of the so-called “mosaic of resistance” decentralised military command, preventing a “decapitation” strike – involving the assassination of political and military leaders, such as Saddam Hussein and his generals – from derailing the strategy of resistance to foreign invasion.

Read the first part of this exclusive interview for Brasil de Fato below:

After around 4 weeks of war, Iran has suffered numerous attacks – with over 2,000 people killed and more than 3 million displaced. Nevertheless, there are several signs that Iran is gaining the upper hand in the confrontation with the US and Israel – as stated even by Sir Alex Younger, former head of MI-6 - controlling the Strait of Hormuz and making the energy (and fertilizer, helium gas) prices skyrocket. Iran has barely begun to use their most sophisticated missiles and, even though, have already inflicted serious damage on Israel, as well as attacking and/or destroying around 13 US bases in the region. You have said in other interviews that the second US war against Iraq (2003) provided important lessons for the Iranian resistance strategy. Could you elaborate on these lessons? And what has Iran also learned from the wars waged by Israel in recent years? In short, what are the main elements of the Iranian resistance strategy against its current adversaries, and why has it been so effective?

The first thing to say, which is the most obvious, is that this is something that the West finds very hard to grapple with. This is an asymmetrical war that has been planned over decades. Because they are used to classic warfare. Essentially two air forces standing up against one another, and the one with the most aircraft, the biggest, far away. So Iran saw this, and it saw it very clearly what happened in 2003 in Baghdad. The Americans carried out this classic warfare, what I call “shoot and scoot”. You go in with massive air attack, and it destroys his command, Saddam Hussein's command structures, his military structures, in three weeks.

And the Iranians looked at this in depth, and they thought: well, how do we avoid this? Because we don't have an air force. We can't have an air force that could challenge Israel or America. So what do we do? And so they came up with this idea, essentially, that in terms of the air force, don't make an air force. Don't try to compete with an air force. Missiles can become the Iranian air force. And that effectively is what has happened. So that was one lesson to understand. And Iran has invested huge amounts of thinking and technology, because still the West is largely orientalist, and imagines that, you know, Iran doesn't have modern technology.

In fact, if you look at some of the statistics of technology, which some technical journals put out, amongst about several different sort of spheres of technology - half a dozen or eight -, Iran is in the top 10, and sometimes in the top four. They have excellent technical qualities and engineering qualities. And so they've invested a lot of this intellectual effort into their missiles, and they are at the forefront, not

on all areas of missiles. Russia has a number of expertise, but sometimes they come to the wrong, and so do the Chinese respect Iran's technical competence. So that was the first lesson.

The second lesson was that what you do is you don't leave all your military structure out in the open for it to be bombed. That is stupid. So what you have to do is you bury it, and you bury it deeply, so that even if it's bombed multiple times, it's still not damaged and attacked. And we've seen this effect with the missile cities.

We have some famous one like Yazd Fortress, this big huge mountain where the big missiles are managed. And that has reinforced, if you like, a special concrete, but it's more than 500 meters down in the mountain. It has a railway system, and the railway system brings missiles to the entrance, there are various tunnel entrances.

The missiles go out from the railway system and pass straight off a railway system, not mobile launchers that the Israelis and Americans are talking about. It goes straight off the railway system, and a new one is rotated into that. The Israelis and Americans have been bombing Yazd consistently since over the last four weeks, and still, even as the bombardments finish, still these large missiles comes out of silos, straight from the depth, up through and out. So bury your infrastructure.

It's also the case that it's buried in the naval sense too. It's buried along the coastline with Hormuz and along the entire Iranian coastline. It's anyway riddled with caves and areas, and it's honeycombed with anti-ship missiles. And those are in the cliffs. Then they have tunnels that go under the sea, and they have submersible drones that can be launched out of tunnels under the Hormuz. And they have these drones, have lithium batteries, so that they have a life on the battery of four days. They are AI-orientated, so that they can find their targets autonomously and attack them. They have, so they can loiter and wait for a target, and then take a target and attack it. They also have mini-submarines. I think they have about 25 mini-submarines. And you say, "well, what's the point of mini-submarines?" The point of mini-submarines is Hormuz is not very deep. That's why there's all this talk about the channels and the main channels that the main ships go by, and then the special channel that is up by Kishinev Island. And so the submarines can go into Hormuz. That's the point. And they can fire anti-ship missiles whilst submerged. Again, invisible to satellites and AWACS and whatever. So that was another element. So protecting from the eyes of the Americans was another lesson from the Iraq War, and is reflected in the fact that in the first stage of this war, Iran destroyed all the radar sites in the Gulf, and several of them elsewhere, and just yesterday destroyed another, one of the few AWACS that are operating in the area.

So they've lost a lot of their capacity, because it's not just about seeing that a missile is coming in and therefore giving warning, which no longer is given to the Israelis. It's only a minute, whereas it was three or four. If you are limited in the amount of interceptors that you have left, you don't have that time that the radars give you to decide and to adjust your air defences, then you are not going to be very successful in air defence.

And then the other aspect of the war that they learned was what is now called Mosaic, but it is a process whereby they divided up the whole of Iran into autonomous commands. There is a small central command, but ultimately it's been dispersed across the whole of the country into autonomous commands. And these autonomous commands have prior prearranged plans for continuing the war in the face of a loss of central command. And I saw this, in fact, it was trialled. I was in Lebanon in 2006 during the war there and Hezbollah were using it and Hezbollah actually took me down to the south and I could see what was happening. So they had these autonomous commands and they cooperated each with the other. This was at the end of the war because you weren't allowed to go in the middle of it, but they commanded. I talked to some of the commanders, but they had their plans to continue the war even if there was no more Beirut. So this is what was in 2006. Now we're many years later and this is what's been implemented. This is the whole machinery comes into action on pre-agreed plans to continue the conflict. They don't have to get permission because they have authority to work on their own initiative and they have their own missiles and they have their own forces. So that was really what I call the third lesson of asymmetrical war that the Iranians developed as a result of Iraq and have been planning this war now for two decades against the United States and its bases in the region.

And the West finds it very difficult mentally to think about it because their processes will “bomb them to hell”, as Trump says. And in fact, that wasn't successful in 2006, in Lebanon, because I remember that: first of all, the Israelis thought it was going to be a short military operation, less than a week. And so they had a target bank for a week. And of course, once the target bank had run out, what do you do? Well you can't go back to the commanders, or to the political elites and say, “well, we've got no more targets, we're going to go home and have lunch”. It doesn't do. So they go on bombing civilian sites, whatever. And mostly they were bombing dummies and mock-ups of mobile launchers, not the real thing. And they moved those mobile launchers back undercover in a very short order. I mean, literally, I recall something like 90 seconds, they could just put it back and go. Too soon for the Israelis to attack. So Hezbollah's main missiles were in huge tunnels. They had their own missile tunnels. I've been to those tunnels. If you go there, you can see. It's called the Spider's Web. They can show you what they were using. So

much of this bombing that we've been hearing about, it's the usual thing that we've heard from the West: "Oh, there have been 38,000 sorties mounted". We heard the same thing. This was the same thing in the bombing of Belgrade: 38,000 sorties. And at the end of it, the Serbian army was pretty much intact. It lost 40, I think, armoured vehicles or something, but it was intact. They were not bombed.

And so the question is, has this bombing been effective? Not how many bombs have been dropped, because we know many of these bombs, particularly later than now, the Israelis are bombing. I'm quoting here the Iranian sources on it, but the Iranians say 20 hospitals have been hit in Tehran and about 600 schools bombed, and 1000 plus children have been injured. We shouldn't be surprised. This is what Israel does in Gaza. This is what it does in Lebanon.

This what they see as pressure. There is pressure on Iran to capitulate, to demoralise the people. But it doesn't work. The Americans actually know this, but sometimes these messages get stuck in the piping. Because they know there's never been a case of being able to create a so called regime change by air power alone. They quote Belgrade, but it was not the case. The government subsequently fell for other reasons, but not bombardment. So there's no doubt the Israeli-American bombing is destructive, but it's not effective.

And obviously, Iran has a plan. And it's a phase. And the other thing they learned from that war in 2003 was that the Americans usually only have the logistics capacity for short force. So the answer is: we do long work, and well done. And that's what they're doing. And so the missiles are metered out very carefully.

So, they're intended to come to, at some point, we don't know exactly when, according to their plan, it will reach a crescendo with a more advanced missile being deployed. To start with, the Iranians were using missiles from the 2012-2013 production batch, basically to sort of draw out the defence systems, to see where they are, and to deplete the intercept. So these were the ideas that gave them the planning. And then, of course, was all the planning for contingencies and other things that you need to do, depending on what will be the subsequent reaction of the United States and Israel.

According to the last compilation of your *Conflicts Forum*, things in Israel seem to be heading to a disaster. The former IDF Ombudsman General Yitzhak Brik stated: "What awaits Israel in the next round [of the war] is frightening" — 'Israel not strategically prepared for a multi-front war which will threaten our very existence'. Israel has built — in the last years — the narrative of the superpower of the IDF — a very efficient army for the killing of unarmed women and children, by the way — but now, it looks like everything is falling apart. This week, both the Yemenis from

Ansarallah and the Resistance in Iraq have joined the war and already launched attacks against Israel. What are the outlooks for Israel in the next weeks, if the war is prolonged?

It is having its effect, because some of the Israeli press, which we look at and analyse in, and publish in the substance [at the Conflict Forum's Substack] has been reporting it. We are having senior generals saying: "we can't go on". The army's chief of staff went to the cabinet in the last days, and said "this is a crisis". He yelled at them: "we can't go on! We got to recruit another 400,000 men. We're losing people. The whole of the idea is breaking!" They were saying this. The crisis is happening in Lebanon, too, because the Hezbollah have been, in the last days, taking out 21 Merkava tanks in one day. And mostly their crews included. Some got out, but mostly they were killed. The Israelis admitted they were having to limit the sort of response to these attacks to only 12 anti-tank missiles a day, because that's all we have to ration ammunition. But the war is much bigger. And I think this is part of the plan. We also have a huge change taking place in Iraq.

What's happening in Iraq right now? What are some of the fallouts within the Shia community in the region?

The killing of the Supreme Leader, the leader of Shi'i Islam and a much admired religious figure, has fired up Shi'ism everywhere, across Iraq, particularly, and Hashad [A-Shaabi, a coalition of 50-70 popular militias, which have been incorporated into the regular armed forces] have been preparing, and a number of ayatollahs of the Mujahideen have called for jihad, a mandatory, legitimate jihad. I don't think it's got that far yet, because I think in Iraq, they're talking about defensive jihad. But nonetheless, we've seen that, and I think you will see this in the coming period. Because in Iraq, there is a grey area between the formal military forces and the Hashad — the Americans refer to them as the PMF [Popular Mobilisation Forces]. But they're on the border of Kuwait now. And they're attacking in Erbil. I think you will see them moving further. I think it's quite likely they will take Kuwait and Iran will take Bahrain. I don't know, no one's told me that particularly, this is just my reading of the ground. I would think this is where things are going. So, we have a a different kind of war than the one that America thought it was getting into.

I was talking to a friend who works for Iranian media, and he told me that apparently this technology of the deep tunnels under the ground, the Iranians had learned from North Korea. Do you know about it?

I believe they did receive assistance for Iran in this field and the missile field. I think Iran has received assistance from other parties.

Given the concepts of 'asymmetric warfare', and the 'mosaic of resistance', you have described this as a brilliant military strategy from Iran. Do you think that Iranians might be ushering in a new chapter in the history of modern military strategies?

Yes, you can attribute much of this to Qasem Soleimani and his initiatives. But what's been happening in Ukraine too. The innovations that the Russians have been introducing, particularly in terms of missiles, in terms of drones, and they're in exchange of it because the Shahed [drones] were lent to Russia, and then Russia has improved some of them and passed them back. But I don't think the Iranians would say this is uniquely Iranian. I think the Iranians have done so much on their own initiative, which is extraordinary. But they don't claim everything. Their missiles have characteristics, particularly the Fatah-2 and others, that I think probably surprised China and Russia as well. This was done by invention at home in Iran, not taken from somewhere else. But yes, it is a new type of warfare. What's it going to mean? It means all the old concepts that still persist — many Western militaries still talk about Desert Storm — and mines and so on — all of those major doctrines are really now finished.

So going back to the support for Iran, there's been a lot of talking about support from China in terms of radars, the Ocean One ship, and apparently also there are rumours about Russian support for Iran, also in intelligence, or maybe in some other areas that we don't know, and some of which we might never know, actually. But what is your assessment about that? I mean, do you think China and Russia are making a difference in this war for Iran? For instance, there are some reported U.S. officials saying that they were surprised about the efficiency of some of the Iranian attacks compared to the 12 days war. And if this is so, if China and Russia are really helping and supporting Iran, could we say that maybe the nightmare of [Zbigniew] Brzezinski [former US president Jimmy Carter's National Security Advisor], who wrote in *The Great Chessboard*, that an alliance among China, Russia and Iran would be unbearable for the United States. So is this nightmare being consolidated as a sort of a front line of the anti-hegemon struggle?

I think it is not yet being consolidated. That's a different question, which is a very important one. But I'll just say something about the first. I think at some point earlier, the Iranians realised that their reliance on American GPS was being both withdrawn and used against them. And then first of all, they moved to the Russian system, Glonass. And then they moved to the Beidou system, within that 25 years partnership agreement with China. China gave them the rights to use the most sophisticated military form of this data. And of course, China has the satellites. And I believe China established satellite connections to Iran so that they could. So I mean, it's pretty obvious. I'm not telling you any secrets because Iran knows when

B-1s take off from the airbase in Britain, and at exactly what time. So they have complete visibility, if you like. In the war in Russia, IRS, Intelligence Reconnaissance Surveillance Structures of America, the satellite, the ability to have an integrated map of the battlefield and of targeting from radars, from AWACS, everything coming together for an integrated system, was really NATO's main contribution to the war against Russia.

The Russians would always complain about AWACS: “where did the data come from?” Well, this wasn't from the Ukrainians, because it's top secret, etc. So what you're seeing now is actually the opposite. It seems that Iran has that system of IRS battlespace for them against the Americans. So whereas the Americans would implement it against Russia, perhaps Russia has some constraints. There's always the issue in Russia, but why didn't they take out the AWACS flying over the Black Sea or something like this? They didn't anyway. But Iran is doing that. And so I think that has been a huge shift in the war, in the IRS ability. I don't know the extent of it. I have no special information on it. But that's what I think has been happening. So that has support. I think both Russia and China are happy to support from behind the scenes. They don't want to put Chinese equipment on the ground where it can be seen by people. But you can't see the data streaks. You can't see they do data streaks, whether they're coming from the Ocean One ship, which is the Chinese. It's a complicated ship, which is doing interception, is doing radar, and it's also doing underwater. So it's fighting submarines in the area. And so it is in a need of war. And I think the other thing to say is that what is different in this war is on the American side, there are no restrictions. Legality, human rights questions, the United Nations, all of this is gone. Its might is right. And that's how it is. And, however, Iran continues not to follow that pattern. They follow a pattern of escalation. If they are attacked at one certain sort of type of target, then they attack back and escalate at the same time. So it's a step and escalation to deter America and Israel from going down this path. So those things are certainly a big difference and change in warfare. A bit scary. No rules, maelstrom, genocide, all of these things. The kidnapping of leaders, killing of leaders, decapitation, murder. I mean, a long time ago, wars were sort of a ritual. People would line up and there were rules and someone would say, OK, the battle starts. We moved to the other extreme.

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