

Pompeo right to call out Iran

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Iran's ruling ayatollahs would be foolish to ignore the forthright warning in US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's landmark address in Cairo on the future of America's Middle East policy under Donald Trump. Speaking at the same university where, in a major policy speech nine years ago, Barack Obama held out the historic olive branch to Tehran which led to the 2015 nuclear deal, Mr Pompeo left no doubt about the extent to which US policy in the region has changed.

Washington, Mr Pompeo declared, was committed to "expel every last Iranian boot" from Syria where, in alliance with Russia, Tehran, in its drive for regional hegemony, has been propping up the murderous Assad regime. Without mentioning Mr Obama by name, Mr Pompeo heaped scorn on the former president's "misguided" thinking on the use of military force and reluctance to call out "radical Islam". That was a reference to Mr Obama's preference for the term "violent extremism" when referring to Islamist terrorism and his call for an "opening towards Muslims" that would "transcend stereotypes".

"Remember: it was here, here in this very city, another American stood before you ... he told you that radical terrorism does not stem from ideology. He told you 9/11 led my country to abandon its ideals in the Middle East," Mr Pompeo said as he argued Mr Obama had misjudged the Arab Spring uprisings. The Obama administration's Middle East policy, he said, was an example of "what not to do", whether in striking the nuclear deal or abandoning long-time ally Hosni Mubarak, Egypt's ruler, allowing him to be brought down by an uprising orchestrated by the Muslim Brotherhood.

With the benefit of hindsight it is easy to criticise Mr Obama. But the Trump administration is right to focus strongly on Iran's hegemonic aggression and support for terrorism, making it clear it will not be tolerated. Tehran's support for Hezbollah and for other terrorist groups seeking to destroy Israel, as well as its involvement in Syria, Yemen and even Afghanistan is the root cause of much of the conflict across the Middle East and the threat it poses to Israel.

The steady spread of Iranian terrorism was highlighted this week when the Dutch government disclosed Iran's intelligence ministry was behind a series of political assassinations in The Netherlands. The revelation followed similar

disclosures by Norway, Sweden and France about recent acts of terror in their countries involving Iran.

Mr Obama made a grave misjudgment in concluding a nuclear deal on the terms that he did with a rogue state so blatantly involved in terror. Mr Pompeo's pledge to "expel every last Iranian boot" deserves the support of US allies. While seemingly at odds with Mr Trump's determination to fulfil his election promise to bring home all US troops from Syria, it demonstrates why he should be in no hurry to abandon Syria altogether.

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