

‘Iran will use all means to defend itself’: Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister

Keynote Speech by Professor Seyed Mohammad Kazem Sajjadpour, deputy minister of Foreign Affairs, Iran, and president of Institute for Political and International Studies, Tehran

By Lim Wei Chean

The United States’ “maximum pressure” campaign has not changed the Islamic Republic’s position, said Professor Seyed Mohammad Kazem Sajjadpour, Iran’s deputy minister of Foreign Affairs on 13 August 2019.

Giving the second keynote speech at The US & Iran: On a Collision Course? conference organised by the National University of Singapore’s Middle East Institute at Orchard Hotel, Dr Sajjadpour, who concurrently is president of the Institute for Political and International Studies in Tehran, laid out Iran’s position and response to the rising tensions between the two countries following America’s withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

The result of US sanctions following the withdrawal is one of “maximum confusion, not maximum pressure”, he added.

To truly understand US-Iran ties, Dr Sajjadpour said one needs to look at the past, the perception, as well as the politics of the situation. Part of the reason for the tensions in the region is because other regional actors, including Saudi Arabia and Israel, want the US to fight their causes for them.

In fact, he said, the Gulf was very secure when the JCPOA, also known as the Iran nuclear deal, was signed. The American withdrawal from the nuclear deal was the cause of insecurity and instability in the region.

He added that US’ pullout of JCPOA has a racial dimension. President Donald Trump felt compelled to repudiate it because it was signed by former President Barack Obama, who is “not the same colour”, he said.

“(Mr) Trump, everyone says he’s not for war, but what is he for?” asked Dr Sajjadpour. For Iran, the answer is clear. He said the US is seeking dominance and hegemony in the region.

Iran negotiated for 2½ years for JCPOA, and despite following the rules, it has been sanctioned. “Did we do anything wrong?” Dr Sajjadpour asked.

“Iran is simply a defensive actor and will use all means to defend itself,” he said, adding that historically, Iran has been able to survive because it has been a strong defender of its territory and culture, and will remain so.

According to him, the way out of the current stalemate is that assumptions must change. The US has the wrong attitudes and assumptions about the Islamic Republic.

“Iran is not a simple country,” he said, and cannot be reduced to a few sentences. He added that Iran is very proud of its culture, land and achievements.

Acceptance — of the Iranian Revolution, and of the Islamic Republic’s politics — is the starting point. “The world must learn to accept Iran as it is,” he said.