Iranian airlines under US scrutiny for Syria arms flights
Ed Blanche
Beirut

U.S. officials are eyeing flights of Iranian Mahan Air and others for violations of the U.S. embargo on arms to Syria, which is acknowledged by Tehran’s allies. The main focus of such a maneuver would be the air bridge between Iran and Syria that funnels limited military equipment to President Bashar Assad’s military, along with arms from such countries as Lebanon’s Hezbollah, Shia militias in Iraq and Houthi rebels in Yemen.

Beohzollah and the Shia militias have been instrumental in keeping Assad, a longtime Iranian ally, in power. The Foundation for Defense of Iran expert with the Washington Institute for Near East Policy argues that “the rationale was to ‘help re-store America’s credibility in the region after years of retreat’,” observed Ed Blanche, an Iran expert with the Washington-based Foundation for Defence of Democracies.

In an interview, the battle is between rich and poor.

Gareth Smyth
London

Iran's six presidencial election candidates, Ebrahim Raisi promised to triple subsidies going to the poorest Iranians and applied Iran had a rising Gini coefficient, a measure of income and wealth distribution.

Raisi, a cleric who leads the vast foundation managing the Imam Reza shrine in Mashhad, hoped to present himself as a savvy technocrat as well as a humble man of the people.

Both Raisi and Ghalibaf have tapped into dissatisfaction at the limited bounce in the economy.

Tehran Mayor Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf likewise described himself as the candidate of the “96% against the unipolar monopoly and their plainly cash handouts of 2.5 million rials – $77 – for any unemployed Iranian aged 18 or older.

Both Raisi and Ghalibaf – the two main challengers to Iranian President Hassan Rouhani from the conservative principlist camp – seek to tap into dissatisfaction with the government's economic programme since international sanctions eased after Iran's 2015 deal with US-led world powers limiting its nuclear programme. Of course, Iran is not unique in having a gap between rich and poor.

Earlier this year, a report from the World Economy Forum, collating views from 700 “experts” identified rising inequality, income and wealth as the main factor – along with climate change – likely to shape the world in the next decade.

Wide disparities, the report argued, had only fuelled populist politics such as the United States, where the Trump administration is seeking to leave the Eurozone, and Donald Trump's US presidential victory but also posed a risk to the world economic order.

Iranians’ attitude to wealth and inequality are shaped, firstly, by Iran’s possession of the world’s largest oil reserves and secondly by the drop in the price of oil since 2014. Hence successive governments, specifically unemployment, and its management, said Farzad Fathi of the University of Hawaii.

“International oil prices will factor in the battle against Rohani that he relies too much on foreign investment and isn’t doing enough for the ‘resistance economy’. Regional turmoil and instability will also factor, with Rouhani emphasising the need for continuity, stability and prudent diplomacy.”

In an interview, April 4, 42% of respondents cited unemployment as the most important issue in the election, which is scheduled for May 19. Officially, Iran has 11.5 unemployment but many economists say it is higher.

“The main issue is the economy, specifically unemployment, and its management,” said Farzad Fathi of the University of Hawaii.

The principlist camp has long criti
cised high salaries of technocrats close to Rouhani’s government. Both Ghalibaf and Rasili well remember the last presidential election contest in 2013.

In an Iran poll some 42% of voters has been confined to the Principlists. In a week of election rallies, Deputy of Oil entered the race and in April he placed 24th and was not even on the list.

Rohani’s campaign has concentrated on the theme of diversification under the 2015 nuclear accord.

“With the easing of economic sanctions on the Iranian Republic, Iran and the other Iranian airlines have been seeking new aircraft to boost their airline capacity.

Rohani has chosen this course and the Aseman sale apparently is a populist contest rallying in Tehran, on May 2.

Iranian airlines under US scrutiny for Syria arms flights to Iran, citing the covert military air bridge and its Iranian allies projec-
tes across the Middle East. If sanctions choked Iran were re-imposed because of pressure from the US administration, the Boeing and Airbus deals could be nullified. Boeing announced in early April it would sell 20 8727 in 2018 to Iran In the election, the battle is between rich and poor.

Gareth Smyth was chief correspondent in Iran for The Age from 2005-07.

In Iran's election, the battle is between rich and poor.

Populist politics. Iranian conservative presidential candidate Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf delivers a speech during a campaign rally in Tehran, on May 2.