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Will America and Iran Go to War?

Trump's high-pressure strategy could chasten Iran—or provoke it.

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The shift is stark. Barack Obama wanted Iran as a friend of America. Donald Trump recognizes Iran—as ruled by radical mullahs—as an enemy.

The former president's efforts enabled Iran to reach new heights in power, to underwrite increased terrorist activity throughout the region, and accelerate its pursuit of nuclear weapons. The current president has sought to reverse those Iranian gains through renewed economic pressure, threats of force, and a stronger American military presence in the region.

Will these tactics work? Evidence is negligible that Iran will back down easily. A series of attacks and belligerent acts shows that Iran will not go quietly, or without a fight. Tensions in the Middle East are growing. Will the United States and Iran go to war?

Iran's Leverage

On May 31, the Hudson Institute in Washington, d.c., held a forum of four renowned Iran scholars from different American think tanks. The forum was designed to address the dramatic shift in American policy toward Iran from the Obama administration to the Trump administration. The former's desire for association with Iran culminated in the Iran nuclear deal, implemented on Jan. 16, 2016. The panel spoke on how President Obama's devotion to this deal tethered him to the negotiations even as the terms became better and better for Iran, and worse for the U.S. and the world. It also compelled him to tolerate the intolerable.

President Obama had warned that if Bashar Assad, the dictator of Syria, used chemical weapons on his own people, America would punish his regime with force. Yet in 2013, when Assad did just that, Obama and his secretary of state, John Kerry, publicly backed away from this redline. Why? Because Assad was Iran's ally, and they didn't want to jeopardize the potential deal with Iran. When the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency presented the Obama Justice Department with proof of Hezbollah's extensive illegal money laundering and drug smuggling (worth up to a billion dollars per year), they couldn't find anyone to prosecute the case—because they were still in negotiations with Hezbollah's patron, Iran. And the day after the nuclear deal was implemented, Iran released four innocent Americans it had been holding hostage. Coincidentally, \$400 million in foreign cash showed up in Iran. Yet the White House insisted this wasn't a ransom payment.

The Iranian regime repeatedly used the threat of walking away from negotiations as leverage to act with impunity across the Middle East.

But on Jan. 20, 2017, that all changed.

The inauguration of President Donald Trump brought one of the swiftest-ever shifts in American foreign policy.

A New Sheriff

Just two weeks after the inauguration, Iran conducted a ballistic missile test. The new president did not hold back. He wrote, "Iran has been formally PUT ON NOTICE for firing a ballistic missile." A day later, he wrote, "Iran is playing with fire—they don't appreciate how 'kind' President Obama was to them. Not me!"

President Trump's anti-Iran policy was clear from the beginning.

His first visit as president to a foreign nation was to Saudi Arabia, Iran's longstanding adversary in the region. There, he called out Iran for fueling "the fires of sectarian conflict and terror," then capped off the tour by signing a \$110 billion arms deal with the Saudis.

In his first speech to the United Nations General Assembly on Sept. 19, 2017, he called on the world to join the U.S. "in demanding that Iran's government end its pursuit of death and destruction."

On December 18 that year, the Trump administration published its first National Security Strategy, which stated, "Iran, the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism, has taken advantage of instability to expand its influence through partners and proxies, weapons proliferation and funding."

But more than words, Trump decided to *act* against Iranian interest. When Assad used chemical weapons on his people, the president fired 59 Tomahawk cruise missiles at his regime. When Hezbollah and other Iranian forces used its bases in Syria to attack Israel, Trump green-lighted the Israeli Air Force razing those installations in its largest aerial assault since the Yom Kippur War. And when Iran used the bounty of cash from the nuclear deal to fund terrorist activities, on May 8, 2018, the president withdrew from Obama's nuclear deal. This reimposed the financial sanctions in place before the deal—and then some.

The attack on the Iranian economy was swift and brutal. On Nov. 5, 2018, the U.S. Treasury sanctioned more than 700 individuals, entities, aircraft and vessels in its largest-ever single-day action targeting Iran. The U.S. stated that any nation or commercial entity that purchased from Iran would also suffer sanctions. This especially hurt Iran's oil industry, which provides around 70 percent of the nation's export revenue.

While most nations kicked and screamed at the sanctions, within months even American adversaries such as China and Turkey weren't bold enough to defy them.

In April 2018, one month before President Trump pulled out of the nuclear deal, Iran exported 2.8 million barrels of oil per day. This May, Bloomberg estimates that Iran exported 226,000 barrels per day—less than 10 percent. Not even the most hawkish economist predicted that the sanctions would be so effective, so quickly.

The result has been catastrophic for Iran's economy. While Iran may be able to hold out for a while on what it calls its "resistance economy," the clock is ticking on the Iranian regime.

As most see it, Iran has three options.

Plan A: Iran could approach America and renegotiate a new nuclear deal, which would be far more encompassing than the former deal and address Iran's ballistic missile program and sponsorship of terrorism.

Plan B: Iran could keep its head low for the next 18 months and bank on Trump losing the 2020 elections. John Kerry has encouraged Iran to do just that. Most Democratic candidates have said they would reinstate the Obama nuclear deal.

Plan C: Iran could fight back.

Recent events indicate that Iran may have chosen Plan C.

If We Can't Sell Oil, No One Can

"We will continue to find buyers for our oil, and we will continue to use the Strait of Hormuz as a safe transit passage for the sale of our oil," Iran Foreign Minister Javad Zarif said at a New York conference on April 24. Then he said this: "If the United States takes the crazy measure of trying to prevent us from [exporting oil], then it should be prepared for the consequences."

Just after sunrise on June 13, two massive tankers full of petrochemicals were attacked in the Gulf of Oman after sailing through the Strait of Hormuz. The *Kokuka Courageous*, a Japanese-flagged vessel en route from Saudi Arabia to Singapore, was struck by an explosive device, likely a magnetic mine that attached to the side of the ship. The resultant fire in the engine room caused the crew to abandon ship. Soon after, Norwegian-owned tanker *Front Altair*, traveling from the United Arab Emirates to Taiwan, was similarly assaulted.

These brazen attacks followed a similar barrage on May 14, when four oil tankers from Norway, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates were struck by limpet mines while at anchor outside Port Fujairah. This port onloads oil drawn by pipeline from inside the Persian Gulf, allowing tankers to avoid transit through the Strait of Hormuz.

A UN investigation into the May 14 incident remarked on its sophistication, using fast boats, limpet mines and naval divers, a "high degree of precision" in the placement of the explosives requiring "minute knowledge" of the ships and an apparent

intent to incapacitate them without sinking them.

All the evidence points to Iran as perpetrator of both the May 14 and June 13 strikes. Their style matches Iran's. Unable to win a full-scale war, Iran liberally uses hybrid warfare, attacking through proxies or with plausible deniability.

And Iran has the motivation to disrupt oil shipping. About 30 percent of maritime oil shipments sail out of the Persian Gulf, directly off the Iranian coast. Threats to safe transit spike oil prices worldwide. In the hours after the June 13 attack, the price of oil jumped 4 percent.

Anthony H. Cordesman, an analyst for the Center for Strategic and International Studies, summarized Iran's capabilities: "Iran also does not have to launch a major war. It can conduct sporadic, low-level attacks that do not necessarily provoke a major U.S. or Arab reaction, but create sudden risk premiums in petroleum prices and the equivalent of a war of attrition. Tankers are inherently vulnerable to relatively small anti-ship missiles and UCAVs [unmanned combat aerial vehicles], and attacks by submersibles and radio-controlled small craft filled with high explosives. Iran can plant 'smart' mines in the bottom of tanker routes that can detect large tankers and home in on them, and be set to arm at widely spaced intervals."

Study a map of Iran's assets. Iran is uniquely positioned to attack and upset global oil trade—not just in the Gulf of Oman, but also in the Persian Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz, the Gulf of Aden and the Bab el-Mandeb, two of the three sides of the Arabian Peninsula.

In addition, Iranian-backed Houthis are skilled at laying naval mines and using exploding boats to disrupt shipping along the third side: the Red Sea.

If the global oil price is affected by attacking just two tankers in the Gulf of Oman, what would happen if Iran mobilized its forces for larger, simultaneous attacks in all these geographic areas? If Iran halts maritime traffic for weeks or even days, the delays and soaring oil prices would heavily damage the global economy.

Iran has the ability to conduct such attacks. But will it?

Bible Prophecy Answers

On the Hudson Institute panel, there was virtual unanimity that Iran must eventually return to the negotiating table, even if it carries out a few more attacks like those in the Gulf of Oman. Perhaps Iran is trying to increase its negotiating power by showing the U.S. what it can do.

Perhaps.

Or maybe, Iran recognizes the likelihood that Mr. Trump will win a second term in 2020, and that its "resistance economy" cannot last six more years.

Bible prophecy reveals that Iran will, in the end, pursue a policy to control the critical oil passageways out of the Middle East.

Many say that Iran negotiated before and will do so again if it is hurting enough. However, it is clear that the Iranians talked with the Obama administration only because they knew they could win. They would have no such confidence this time around, especially if Trump's goal is to change the fundamental nature of the Islamic regime.

Regardless of whether Iran negotiates in the near term, biblical prophecy reveals that Iran will, in the end, pursue a policy to control the critical oil passageways out of the Middle East.

Daniel 11:40-45 state that an end-time "king of the south" will gain control over Egypt, Libya and Ethiopia. For over three decades, the *Trumpet* has identified this king of the south as a radical Islamic bloc, led by Iran.

Leading radical Islam will give Iran a grip on many of the world's major oil choke points. Control of Egypt would mean control of the Suez Canal and great stretches of the Red Sea. Control of Ethiopia would probably include mastery of the Horn of Africa and the Bab el-Mandeb, another critical oil choke point that Iran can control via the Houthis, its proxy in Yemen. Libya is an oil-producing nation and would add a strategic base on the Mediterranean. Add to that the Strait of Hormuz and the Gulf of Oman—and beyond that, a strong will and the right conditions—and Iran could, at least temporarily, lock down all the oil flowing out of the Middle East. This would force other nations to act.

As far back as December 1994, *Trumpet* editor in chief Gerald Flurry speculated that an attack on global oil supplies by Iran would have colossal ramifications. It "could help trigger a collapse of the Western world's weak currencies," he wrote. "This in turn could cause Europe to quickly unite into the most powerful economic bloc in the world. That very event is prophesied to occur in your own Bible!"

In May 2015, Mr. Flurry wrote, "It is not far-fetched to envision Iran using its power to control the flow of oil out of the Middle East. The supreme leader of Iran, Ayatollah Khamenei, has threatened as much." He quoted an article from the Iranian state-sponsored Tasnim News Agency that said, "Today, all the arteries of oil transport—from Bab el-Mandeb Strait to Suez Canal and the Strait of Hormuz—are under Iranian control, by means of Syria, Yemen and Bahrain, and within range of Iranian missiles."

The Bible's prophecies bring force to these projections. They also broadly answer the question of just how far America and Iran will go toward war.

Daniel 11:40 reads, "And at the time of the end shall *the king of the south* push at him: and the *king of the north* shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, and with horsemen, and with many ships; and he shall enter into the countries, and shall overflow and pass over." This is an end-time prophecy. It concerns our time today, and it directly describes these Middle Eastern nations.

The "king of the north" in this verse is a German-led European power. This prophecy reveals that the Iranian-led power will *push* at Europe.

Will it use its control of Middle Eastern oil to make that push?

Eventually Europe will fully see that this strategy and Iran's overall strategy of aggressiveness and terror is a definite *push*. Already, many nations have naval bases in the Horn of Africa, likely positioning themselves to counter this threat.

The Bible reveals that it will be Europe who pushes back and comes "against him like a whirlwind." This Iranian-led coalition, "the king of the south," *will be wiped out*.

But it will not be at the hand of a Trump-led America. It will be by an aggravated, empowered European empire!

This European counterstrike against the Iranian push will initiate a far wider war. As revealed in the verses that follow in Daniel 11, this great last war will rapidly engulf the rest of the world. It will bring a period of unparalleled suffering for mankind—"a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time" (Daniel 12:1).

Other biblical verses reveal that this world war will be savage and deadly, but brief—and will culminate in the coming of the Messiah, an event that will at last end the suffering of mankind.

If you understand and believe these prophecies, God also offers you a way to escape such a calamity. Daniel 12:1 also states, "[A]nd at that time *thy people shall be delivered*, every one that shall be found written in the book." God offers protection for a special group of people who will stand and deliver this message of warning to the world. If you want to know what it takes to be a part of that group, and to understand more fully how Iran's current policy in the Middle East will push the world to that final war, request a free copy of our editor in chief's booklet *The King of the South*. ■