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Iran's Provocations and the Patience of Trump

By Steve Bakke  January 24, 2020



Impeachment proceedings and trial have been in full swing for several weeks, and as the Democrats tried to do with Judge Kavanaugh – something new seems to be thrown at the President about every day. Along came a series of recent events involving Iran and those actions were added to the top of the Trump's pile of alleged transgressions.

Few critics have bothered to line up Iranian vs. U.S. tensions, or actual military incidents during Trump's presidency, to objectively evaluate his decisions and their future implications. This is a brief commentary on some of them.

Trump pulled out of Obama's 2015 nuclear "agreement" with Iran and resumed economic sanctions for several reasons. It wasn't a real agreement or treaty because Iran wasn't a signatory, and the U.S. Senate didn't approve it because of bi-partisan objections.

The monitoring process was absurdly ineffective. Iran could easily delay scrutiny because of lenient procedures for dispute resolution and could dodge scrutiny by declaring certain military facilities off limits for inspections. Nevertheless, Obama had sweetened the nuclear deal with over a billion dollars of "unfrozen Iranian funds" which most agree ended up funding Iranian General Suleiman's Quds force.

In May 2019, Iran began responding with actions intended to create chaos and crisis in the U.S. For example, Iran detonated mines on one Norwegian-flagged, and three Saudi oil tankers. The U.S. had conclusive video proof, but Iran never acknowledged involvement. Trump limited this response to a warning.

Soon thereafter, in June 2019, Iran boldly shot down an unarmed U.S. surveillance drone. After considering a retaliatory airstrike, Trump decided not to attack Iranian troops because no lives had been lost in the drone incident. He concluded that would be disproportionate, so he chose cyber-attacks and additional sanctions instead.

In September, Iran instituted an attack on Saudi oil facilities using drones and cruise missiles. While much damage was done to the facilities, Trump responded with what is referred to as "soft power sanctions." That refers to measures more modest than military action or severe economic sanctions.

Apparently because previous actions didn't result in crisis, chaos, or significant military retaliations, Iran rocketed a joint U.S.-Iraqi air base and killed an Iraqi-American contractor. That went over Trump's "red line." He responded by ordering airstrikes on Iranian supported militias, killing 24 and wounding many more. That was in late December, just a few weeks ago.

Furthering their attempt to stir up criticism and chaos around Trump, General Suleimani planned and carried out an attack on the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad. You can be sure they were attempting to conjure up memories of the Benghazi incident in which several Americans were killed, including our Ambassador. Iran probably wanted Trump to over-react by ordering a massacre of the fighters attacking the embassy. That didn't happen.

Trump initially ordered in Marine troops which ended the attack peacefully, and on January 3, 2020 ordered the fatal attack on the leader, General Suleimani and a militia leader. We'll probably never know for sure, but Trump was convinced more embassy attacks had been planned by Suleimani.

Iran followed with a futile retaliatory rocket attack on U.S. Iraqi bases. There were injuries, but no fatalities. Then came the embarrassing unintentional Iraqi missile attack on a Ukrainian commercial airliner, killing 176. Of course, Trump's critics blame that on his mishandling this recent series of Iranian incidents.

Most democrats claim Trump overreacted in his recent decisions regarding Iran. As with so many controversies surrounding Trump, it's just a matter of politics and "personal opinion" whether one supports his actions or not.

This series of incidents seem to support the opinion that Trump's Iran actions have been patient and proportionate. I believe he did a good job of balancing restraint and force and that he seriously wants a peaceful solution in arriving at a non-nuclear Iran.

I wonder what will be next.

(If you want to review this subject further, there are many easy to find sources. Two brief commentaries were valuable to me in writing this article. Appearing in the online publication "CASMII" you'll find "The history of Trump vs. the IRGC." And Johnathan R. Keiller assembled a brief compilation of U.S./Iran conflicts and incidents. It appeared in "American Thinker.")