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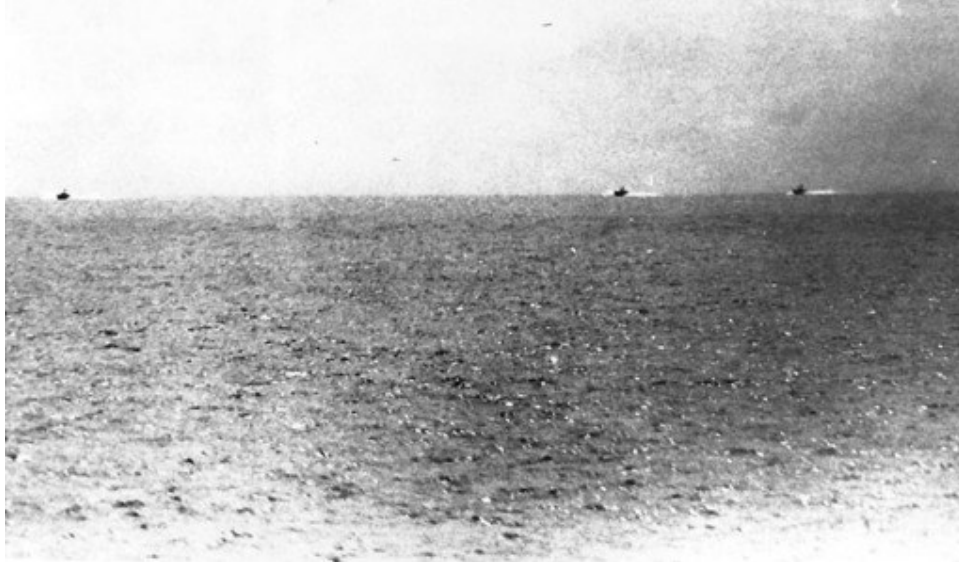
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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

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From the Gulf of Tonkin to the Persian Gulf



Photograph Source: U.S. Navy sailor aboard USS Maddox – Public Domain

Beijing.

The number of world wars should bury the argument that history does not repeat itself. But the detail is different, and the devil is in the detail.

Iran. Can warmongers again offer the arguments of weapons of mass destruction? No. The Iraq playbook can't be repeated, but you don't have to go too far back to find one that may suit.

Question. Where is Iran.

It's in the Gulf.

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OK, Gulf, well, we obviously can't have Gulf War or justify intervention over the invasion of an emirate.

But we have had a Gulf before. True, different location, but it worked a treat. Dust down the Gulf of Tonkin scenario. The phantom attack on the USS Maddox in 1964 led to greater US military involvement in Vietnam.

A Great playbook from 1964. A US ship, a new Maddox, only this time hit by Iranian bullets from a speedboat. And it's in the Gulf. The real Gulf.

National Security Adviser John Bolton announced on May 5 that the administration had ordered a carrier strike group to the Persian Gulf (short note on descriptions, it's also called the Iranian Gulf or the Arabian Gulf, damn details). This was done on the basis of "troubling and escalatory indications and warnings" of unspecified Iranian threats. Brilliant, nothing definite, nice and vague. Then, a week later four oil tankers (two Saudi, one Norwegian and one Emirati) were damaged in an alleged "sabotage" attack. Again, few details have been released about the incident, which is said to have taken place early on May 12 within the territorial waters of the United Arab Emirates in the Gulf of Oman, east of the key UAE oil terminal port in Fujairah, near the Straits of Hormuz

Global maritime news websites have questioned the details surrounding the incident. The influential Lloyds List Maritime Intelligence, for example, criticized the authorities for "scant" information.

Maritime security company Dryad Global in a note to clients said "Saudi reticence to report the incident accurately within their own media channels and the current failure to provide imagery evidence of the attack raises important questions as to the nature of the attack.

"It remains unlikely that the risk to safety of vessels and crew will increase significantly in the short term however delays to commercial operations and the potential for interactions with military/militia forces has increased," the report added.

Candidate Trump vowed to slash American deployments in the Middle East and vowed to "bomb the hell out of ISIS" and "take the oil." Trump has let it be known that he has told the Pentagon he does not want war with Iran but consistency of message is not one of his strong points.

A conflict with Iran would represent a greater military challenge than toppling the Taliban or Saddam. Iran has a recognized ability to attack US forces and their allies directly and through proxy forces throughout

the Middle East and perhaps well beyond.

The global economy would also feel the consequences. About 20 percent of the global oil supply passes through the Straits of Hormuz.

And what exactly is under consideration? Bombing key targets in Iran, limiting civilian casualties? Or the overthrow of the regime? What would define the success of military intervention?

Again history can provide some answers. Iranians elected Mohammad Mossadeq in 1951 and he renationalised the country's oil production, which had been under British control through the Anglo-Persian Oil Company – which later became British Petroleum or BP.

The CIA played a key role in the 1953 coup which ousted him and reinstated the Shah. He fled in 1979.

The reinstatement of a Shah-type figure would be impossible but US intervention in Iran? Why when you ask that question does the phrase “those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it” spring to mind?

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