

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نباشد تن من مباد بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

by MELVIN GOODMAN
27.06.2019

The U.S.-Iran Imbroglio: Dangerous Lessons To Be Learned



Photograph Source: Tasnim News Agency – [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

The bizarre decisions and events over a 48-hour period between the United States and Iran outlined the dangerous times that we are confronting and point to Donald Trump as the most dangerous aspect of all. Iran is a problem for U.S. interests, but not a genuine threat. The same cannot be said for Trump whose instability and unpredictability threaten not only the United States but the entire global community. The fact that his key advisers—National Security Adviser John Bolton and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo—

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

are bellicose and even irrational worsens the situation. The absence of a genuine national security process and the decline of U.S. diplomacy contributes to a situation that finds the Department of Defense and the Pentagon, without adult or even civilian supervision, playing an outsized role.

Ironically, pundits and politicians are ruining the current absence of the “adults in the room,” all general officers, who supplied a measure of stability for most of Trump’s first two years in the White House. Generals Jim Mattis, H.R. McMaster, and John Kelly brought some moderating influence to Trump’s risky and erratic behavior dealing with Syria, Russia, and the issue of immigration, respectively, during their time as secretary of defense, national security advisor, and chief of staff.

Instead of Mattis, McMaster, and Kelly, we have a troika of Bolton, Pompeo, and CIA director Gina Haspel who strongly advocated the use of military force. This is particularly disconcerting in the case of Haspel, who does not head a policy organization and who should never be advocating policy. Haspel should not have been confirmed as a CIA director in the first place because of her active role in conducting torture and abuse, running a notorious secret prison, and drafting the cable that ordered the destruction of the 92 torture tapes. Pompeo, moreover, favors the return of torture as a means of “gathering vital intelligence.”

Trump has put in place a virtual “war cabinet.” We have a situation that finds Secretary of State Pompeo thoroughly loyal to the president, and a CIA director thoroughly loyal to the secretary of state. Instead of a national security process, we have three individuals who believe in the use of force and, in the case of Bolton, regime change. The fact that “acting” directors are heading the Department of Defense, the Department of Homeland Security, and other departments and agencies of government help to create the current dysfunctional situation we find in both foreign and domestic policy. The leadership void at the Pentagon is particularly disconcerting.

Of course, it was wrong from the outset to believe that any group of so-called “adults in the room” could form serious opposition to Trump’s potentially reckless behavior or that Trump himself would use any single individual to rein in his impulsive actions. The mainstream media has been too careful and tentative in describing our current commander-in-chief who declared at a campaign rally in Iowa in 2015 that “I’ve had a lot of wars of my own. I’m really good at war. I love war....” Yet, the media seems to

accept at face value that Trump has “struck an unusually friendly tone toward Iran,” according to the Washington Post, or that Trump called off the strike after belatedly learning that there would be about 150 Iranian deaths in the wake of a U.S. strike, according to the New York Times.

The most incongruous aspect of Trump’s explanation of his reversal was that he stopped the plan at the last minute because “I didn’t think it was proportionate.” The word “proportionate” stands out in view of Trump’s limited vocabulary, and the prominent place of “proportionality” in the lexicon of moral warfare. This is from a man who rarely speaks in complete sentences, cannot tweet in polished paragraphs, and never uses sophisticated vocabulary. In any event, twenty-four hours later, he was telling NBC’s “Meet the Press” that, if Iran resumed its nuclear program, it would face “obliteration not like you’ve ever seen before.” Proportionate, of course.

In view of Trump’s record as a pathological liar, his lack of impulse control and even a moral compass, there must be reasonable speculation on his sudden and unexpected reversal regarding the use of force. Presidents and politicians are human; they can change their positions or develop new ones. But Trump does so at a dizzying pace. Even Senator Lindsey Graham (R-SC), the leading Trump truckler in the Congress, once referred to the “Tuesday Trump” who agreed to a bipartisan immigration bill one day and became the “Friday Trump” when he walked away from the deal several days later. Trump’s explanation of his decision making swerve must be dismissed out of hand.

Since no one inside his administration appears to have any influence over Trump, we need to look outside our own political arena and look elsewhere for someone who could have convinced Trump to walk away from the immediate gratification of the use of force. Are we to believe that a journeyman reporter, Tucker Carlson, from Trump’s network, FOX News, was responsible for the president’s volte-face? Sherlock Holmes once wrote that the “dog that didn’t bark is often the clue.” Well, we have heard nothing about the Russians in the context of this crisis, and perhaps we have a candidate (or agent of influence) in Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The Russians in two previous crises over the past thirty years tried to convince the White House that the use of force in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf must be avoided. Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev believed he had convinced Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein to withdraw his forces from Kuwait, but couldn’t convince President George H.W. Bush of delaying the use of force. When the Russians were facing President

Barack Obama's possible use of force against Syria for crossing the "red line" regarding the use of chemical weapons, Putin and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov convinced Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry to stand down.

Putin may be an unlikely candidate for such a mediating role, but there are reasons for him to try to do so. The Russians, unlike the Americans, have access to the leadership in Tehran and the two sides have coordinated policy on occasions in Syria. Putin himself would be placed in a weak position if the United States were to use military force against a nation that the Kremlin supports that also happens to share a border with former Soviet republics. The Russians would have no clear military role in trying to defend Iran, and Putin would be personally embarrassed if the United States were to strike with impunity. As far-fetched as all of this sounds, Russia would gain a feather in its cap if it were to play a mediating role in the Persian Gulf; it might even be the catalyst for resuming a diplomatic dialogue with the United States.

It has been lost in all of the noise of Russian interference in the U.S. presidential election of 2016, but one of the reasons why Putin chose Trump over Hillary Clinton in the first place was the strong belief he could do business with Trump. Putin's animus toward Clinton has not been properly examined even if it can be easily documented. One must remember that it was Clinton who drew parallels between Putin's annexing of Crimea and Hitler's claims of protecting German minorities when he invaded Central and Eastern Europe. George F. Kennan was made persona non grata as ambassador in 1951 for comparing Stalin and Hitler. Kennan soon acknowledged that "it was a foolish thing for me to have said." Hillary Clinton never understood the extent of her obnoxious comparison.

In any event, the entire international community now knows that Trump's national security team is dysfunctional; that a president was making military decisions without relevant information; and that his administration is fundamentally divided between civilian "chicken hawks" and professional military moderates.

C'est la guerre.

JUNE 26, 2019