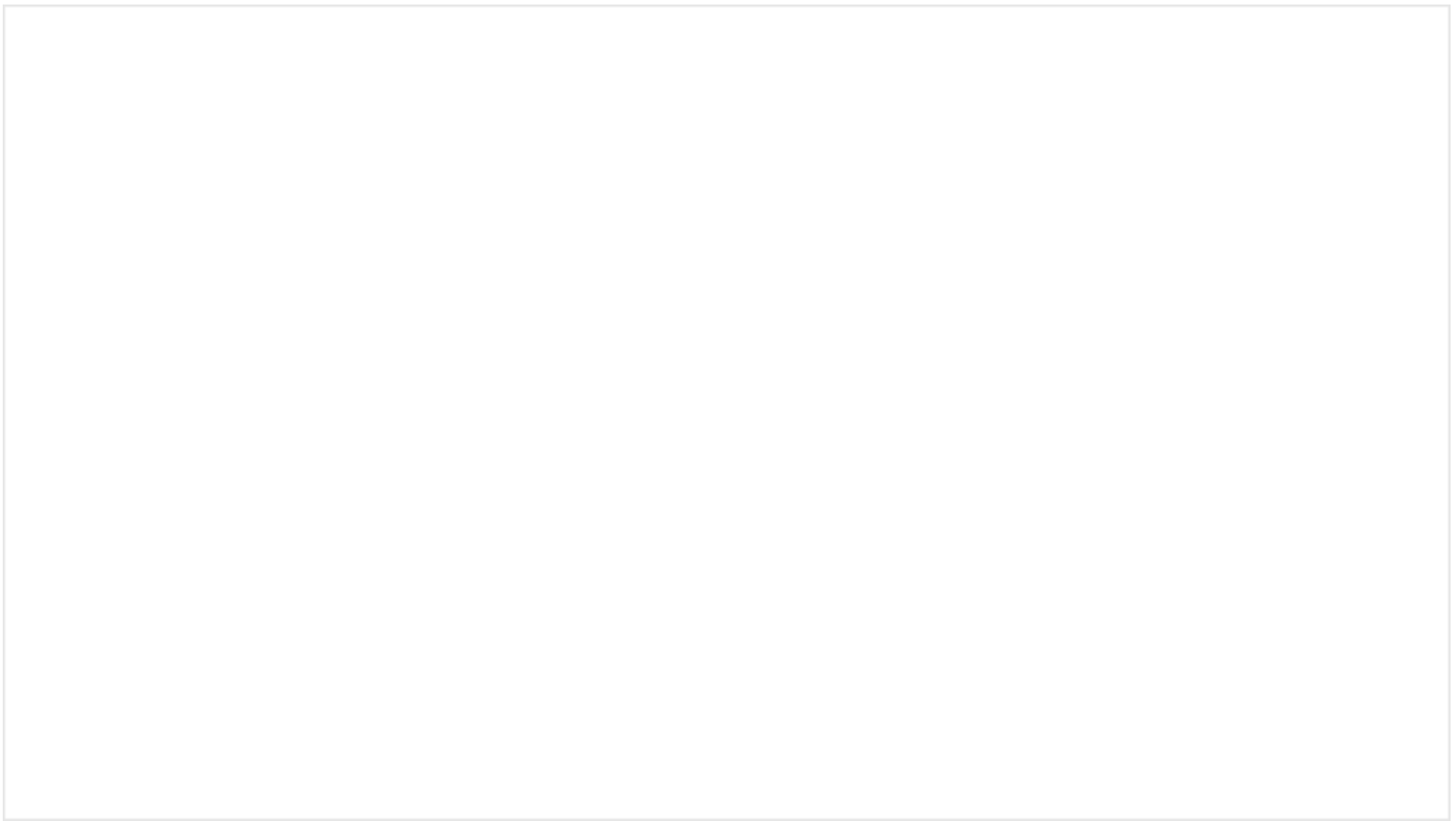


Can We Stop the Slow Slide to a U.S.-Iran War?



May 5, 2019 *Topic:* Security *Region:* Middle East *Tags:* Iran, Middle East, Terrorism, Quds Force, Strategy

Responsible international, U.S. and regional policymakers must come together to chart a diplomatic course that promotes broad dialogue and engagement with Iran to avoid a possible war.



In his recent talk at Asia Society in New York, Iranian foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif blamed the “B-Team” —U.S. national security adviser John Bolton, Israel prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates crown prince Mohammed bin Zayed—for “pushing the U.S. toward disaster” in spite of the Trump’s campaign promise not to get involved in expensive foreign wars. He also offered to negotiate a humanitarian deal for exchange of prisoners, but the United States refused.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo reportedly told a group of Iranian-American community leaders the United States’ best interest is “a non-revolutionary set of leaders leading Iran.” Meanwhile, the U.S. State Department announced the end of waivers for countries to import Iranian oil to drive Iran’s exports to zero. “They truly believe that they can ... collapse Iran’s economy and bring it into recession and essentially bring

the Iranians to their knees, to the point where they're either coming to us and begging for talks, or where we're essentially leading to regime collapse and something follows on," said Richard Johnson, one of the State Department's former top experts on nuclear issues.

Two weeks after President Donald Trump designated Iran's elite Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a foreign terrorist organization, Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei appointed Major General Hossein Salami as the new head of the IRGC. Iran's National Security Council designated the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) as a terrorist organization, called the United States a sponsor of terrorism, and warned of the consequences of its moves toward peace and security in the Middle East. In early 2019, Major General Salami warned Israel that the outbreak of a war with Iran would result in the elimination of Israel. With Netanyahu now entering a fifth term as prime minister of Israel, the already-disastrous Israeli-Palestinian relationship is likely to be made much worse for the region with the release of the Trump administration's peace plan. Furthermore, a ramping up of tensions with Iran seems more likely because Bibi is the devil on Trump's shoulder, whispering provocations into his ear.

However, containing the current confrontational trend is an option on the table. There are several constructive historical incidents between Iran and the United States worth considering.

First, in the late 1980s, Iran welcomed a proposal by the United States to improve relations—encapsulated by the elder President George Bush's declaration that "goodwill begets goodwill." At that time, I was mandated by the late President Hashemi Rafsanjani to pursue this matter. With the support of the IRGC's Quds Force, Iran facilitated the release of American

and Western hostages in Lebanon, but the United States responded by heightening pressures and hostilities.

Second, after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the United States asked Iran for help in its so-called “war on terror” in Afghanistan. In the meantime, Iran decided to aid the United States in efforts to defeat the Taliban in Afghanistan. This time, too, the IRGC’s Quds Force was instrumental in paving the path for the U.S. military campaign to remove the Taliban in 2001. In return, President George W. Bush named Iran a member of the “axis of evil,” which was shameful in every possible way.

Third, after the United States went into a ruinous war with Iraq in 2003, America again needed Iran’s help to manage Iraq post-Saddam. Virtually all major Shia-led opposition groups to the Saddam Hussein's dictatorship were residing in Iran. The IRGC’s Quds Force facilitated their return and cooperation with U.S. CENTCOM. Iran’s goodwill in Iraq, too, did not receive a positive response.

Fourth, in early January 2016, when two U.S. Navy riverine command boats illegally entered into Iranian territorial waters and sixteen American sailors were captured, then-Secretary of State John Kerry called Foreign Minister Javad Zarif and asked for immediate assistance. The sailors were released, safe and sound, and without any trials fifteen hours later. I personally asked Minister Zarif: how did you facilitate their release so quickly? He replied: “this was made possible solely due to IRGC’s collaboration.” Imagine if such an incident occurs today?

These are historical examples proving Iran assisted the United States while its goodwill’s never begot goodwill on the part of the Americans. A negative consequence of the current escalation of U.S. hostility with Iran is that Washington cannot reach out Iran for logistical and strategic support in

the future.

Over the past two decades, the U.S. Army, as the most powerful force in the world, has faced humiliating defeats in the Middle East. It has waged wars in Afghanistan and Iraq while participating in military operations in Libya, Yemen and Syria, but all with tangibly negative outcomes. For instance, after seventeen years of occupying Afghanistan, billions in U.S. aid have failed to defeat the Taliban—instead, the United States is negotiating with the Taliban after they have taken over half of the country. The United States also fully supported the Saudi war on Yemen, which has created the world's largest humanitarian disaster. Repeatedly, Trump has said that the United States “stupidly” spent \$7 trillion in wars such as Afghanistan and Iraq. Now the U.S. Army is operating in a risky climate in the region, with heightened risks of confrontation.

It is crucial to note that the IRGC and the Quds Force have been on the forefronts of fighting ISIS terrorism. Iraqi officials frequently have confirmed that without Iran's contribution, the central government in Baghdad would have fallen apart. The commander of the Iraqi Air Force, Hamid al-Maliki, said Iran is still the “number 1” supporter of Iraq in its fight against terrorism, praising the Islamic Republic's active role in fighting ISIS. Therefore, the third negative consequence of Trump's anti-Iran policies is undermining the war on ISIS and Al Qaeda.

A global disaster will occur if Trump decides to mobilize the U.S. Army against the IRGC and the Quds Force in a military confrontation. If he does so, the Middle East and North Africa will turn upside down. Iran has access to tens of thousands of young militants across the region, leading to a situation that will be much graver than that of Afghanistan and Iraq.

Former U.S. president Jimmy Carter just recently said that “the US has only

enjoyed 16 years of peace in its 242-year history, making the country ‘the most warlike nation in the history of the world.’ This is ... because of Washington’s tendency to force other nations to adopt our American principles.” Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, Iran and the United States have practiced the strategy of “No war, No peace.” But with the current U.S. administration’s confrontational strategy, the option of “No War, No Peace” is reaching an end.

Despite their disagreements about internal issues, Iranians will unite to resist U.S. bullying and to defend their integrity and independence. Every economic, military, or diplomatic policy intended to coerce Iran will impede diplomacy and/or coordination in the anti-ISIS campaign. Responsible international, U.S. and regional policymakers must come together to chart a diplomatic course that promotes broad dialogue and engagement with Iran to avoid a possible war.

Ambassador Seyed Hossein Mousavian is a Middle East Security and Nuclear Policy Specialist at Princeton University and a former spokesman for Iran’s nuclear negotiators. His latest book, Iran and the United States: An Insider’s view on the Failed Past and the Road to Peace was published by Bloomsbury in May 2014. For the latest visit: www.hosseinmousavian.com.

Image: Reuters

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OR SIGN UP WITH DISQUS  **Old Codger** · 4 days ago

I suggest that Iran should close and blockade the Straits of Hormuz.
Firing on a USN ship would be a good idea too!

 |  · Reply · Share **Abdolnaser Sadidi** · 4 days ago

First and foremost, let us be clear. The Writer is an old regime negotiator diplomat engaged in nuclear talks before. Mousavian is using this platform for sending out regime propaganda. The old story of dividing regime in hardliner & moderates in no longer going to fool anyone. For the past 20 years they succeeded in that line and by doing that have established their control on the region. Foremost, people of Iran have denounced all sects of regime during their uprisings since December 2017. They chant "no to hardliner, no to moderates, game is over". 40 years of corruption, plundering public resources, execution of tens of thousands, torture is the result of the only caliphate in the region. Export of terror abroad is another characteristic of the regime in the name of religion, which is a disguise for all its handling.

The only way forward is to limit regime's malign behavior inside & outside of Iran by applying maximum pressure, thus forcing regime to accept secretary Pompeo's 12-point plan.

1  |  · Reply · Share **Swift Laggard II** → **Abdolnaser Sadidi** · 4 days ago

do you advocate your country being bombed (i am assuming you are Iranian)? Do you imagine those who installed the dictatorship of the Shah mean well for Iranian nation? Are you a supporter of the Pahlavi dynasty?

1  |  · Reply · Share **Abdolnaser Sadidi** → **Swift Laggard II** · 4 days ago

It seems you have misunderstood my comments. Yes, I am a proud Iranian & I do not think anything with the incumbent tyranny has anything to do with either Iran or Iranian culture and history. This regime will only go with a popular uprising like the one which overthrew Shah's. US maximum pressure policy is beneficial in regard to suffocating regime & terrorist designated IRGC from financial resources.

Finally I cannot agree more with you that wherever & whenever US intervened

militarily it only caused more destruction, pain & suffering, one need not to look beyond Iraq. To many Iranians belief; Donald Trump's Iran policy is in contrast to what Obama did in 2009. Iranian masses asked for US support but Obama chose to side with their oppressors Khamenei & his regime Obama let regime & its terrorist IRGC gain upper-hand in nuclear talks while they were in control in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon & Yemen. A complete failure & a disaster for the region.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›

 **Swift Laggard II** → Abdolnaser Sadidi · 4 days ago

so what exactly do you want trumb to do short of war? what do you want to see under maximum pressure? and are you aware that regime insiders never suffer from such policy but it is the ordinary people who will suffer?

^ | v · Reply · Share ›

 **Benson Hakim** → Swift Laggard II · 3 days ago

He is a "proud Iranian" who supports another country to intervene in his county's affairs through wars and things like "maximum pressure"? Yep the US has an excellent record at being very successful at both because we see that success and everlasting peace in countries like Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya where the US intervened to save the day. Meanwhile,Obama negotiated with whoever was in power to avoid bloodshed in Iran. What would you have him do? Send troops in to overthrow the regime? Under what reason this time? Which side of the "people" exactly would the US have taken to justify booming Iran?

No, I don't think Abdolnaser Sadidi is a "proud Iranian" who knows what he wants for his country. If he is Iranian, he probably lives outside of Iran in the safety of another country where he has the luxury of spewing bullshit. I think the latter is the truth.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›

 **dalmar23** · 4 days ago

Surprisingly unbiased article

^ | v · Reply · Share ›

 **mrpoohead** · 4 days ago

They'll be no war, the only one thinking Iran is a problem are the idiots in the WH - they need something to deflect from the fact that they've failed to fulfil one of Trump's promises. No wall,

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