

Minutes to disaster: Lessons to be learned from the confrontation with Iran

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On Thursday evening, the United States military was ten minutes away from launching a series of air and missile strikes on Iran that risked sparking a massive new war leading to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people.

The strikes were called off at the last moment, amid deep divisions at the highest levels of the White House and the Pentagon over the consequences—military, diplomatic and political—of what would likely be the single most dangerous and reckless action of the entire Trump presidency.

While Trump's foreign policy team—headed by National Security Advisor John Bolton and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo—"unanimously" supported the attack, General Joseph Dunford, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, "cautioned about the possible repercussions of a strike, warning that it could endanger American forces," the *Times* wrote.

According to the *Wall Street Journal*, Trump "changed his mind because he had second thoughts about the military and political consequences." Or, as Stratfor, put it, "Trump, fearing a much bigger escalation, got cold feet."

While much of the discussion has been centered on the American president's last-minute decision, the entire episode underscores the recklessness that pervades all aspects of American foreign policy.

Discounting Trump's claim that his decision to call off the bombing was motivated by squeamishness over the loss of 150 Iranian lives, it is evident that the United States came within minutes of launching a war whose military consequences it had not seriously examined.

The planned enterprise was based, again, on disastrous miscalculations, this one being that Iran would stand helplessly by as the US military launched

yet another wave of bombings.

But Iran's downing Thursday of a \$130 million RQ-4 Global Hawk high-altitude spy plane, the nominal pretext for the planned strike, had clearly taken US officials by surprise.

As it turned out, Iran's downing of the drone seemed at the last minute to have convinced sections of the military, and Trump himself, that the consequences of their planned assault on Iran could be far more serious than they had expected. If they were surprised by this development, what other surprises would have followed had a war begun?

The real reason for the reversal, to be blunt, was the fear that American warships could be sunk and American aircraft would be shot down, puncturing the myth of America's military invincibility.

The American surveillance drone was shot down by a Raad air defense system, an Iranian surface-to-air missile generally regarded to be far less capable than the Russian-made S-300 and S-400 systems also available to the Iranian military.

The clear message was that Tehran was also capable of downing other aircraft, including American F-35 fighters that Trump routinely praises as "invisible," or even the \$2 billion B-2 Spirit "stealth" bomber.

Iran recently deployed a new range of anti-ship missiles, which it claims have the ability to sink American destroyers and carriers in the Gulf of Oman and Persian Gulf. "Commit the slightest stupidity, we will send these ships to the bottom of the sea along with their crew and planes," Iranian General Morteza Qorbani warned RT.

The strikes against Iran would likely have been carried out by the USS Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier and its associated battle group, consisting of at least three destroyers and one cruiser. But under these

conditions, the US military was forced to see these ships not just as military assets, but as liabilities. What would be the consequences of Iran sinking a \$2 billion destroyer and killing a substantial portion of its nearly 300 crew?

If Iran sank the Nimitz-class carrier USS Abraham Lincoln, with 5,000 sailors and airmen aboard, the consequences would be incalculable.

As a former member of Iran's Revolutionary Guards told the *Times*, "What happened in the past 48 hours was extremely important in showing Iran's strength and forcing the U.S. to recalculate... No matter how you look at it, Iran won."

But the Iranians would be ill-advised to boast. The United States came within minutes of launching a war whose consequences had barely been considered. There is no reason to believe that the next incident will not have the catastrophic outcome that were narrowly avoided this time—whether against Iran or another target. (One need only recall that after nearly 250 American soldiers were killed in the 1983 Beirut barracks bombings, US President Reagan responded two days later by invading Grenada.)

The entire US foreign policy establishment, even if some are prepared to admit that there had been insufficient consideration of the consequences of an attack on Iran, are deeply frustrated by the outcome.

"The Trump administration should respond to these recent attacks with strikes of its own on Iranian and Houthi air-defense assets, offensive missile systems and Revolutionary Guard Corps bases," wrote Michael G. Vickers, Obama's undersecretary of defense for intelligence in the *Washington Post*. He added, "Failure to hit back will only embolden them further."

Martha Raddatz, hosting ABC's *This Week*, pressed the Texas war hawk Representative Mac Thornberry whether "anything less than a military retaliatory strike" would be proportional "after they shot down an \$130 million drone in an unprovoked attack?"

The recklessness of the US threats against Iran can only be explained by the enormous crisis, global and domestic, that confronts American capitalism.

Trump does nothing more than give the most grotesque expression to the manic impulses of American imperialism. One moment he is within minutes of launching a missile strike against Iran, then he is talking about making "Iran great again," and then

he is threatening to "obliterate" the country.

This level of instability does not have its source in an individual. Trump himself is buffeted by forces that he is not even intellectually capable of understanding.

Thirty years of endless war have created a veritable cult of militarism within the American ruling elite, whose guiding assumption seems to be that wars can be waged without drastic global consequences, including for the United States itself.

There are parallels to the recklessness that prevailed before 1914, not to mention the desperation that led Hitler to launch the Second World War in 1939, and just 78 years ago yesterday, Nazi Germany's catastrophic invasion of the Soviet Union.

The United States has responded to every foreign policy disaster—from the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq to the bombing of Syria and Libya—by preparing for new, and bigger, wars.

There does not exist any constituency within the American ruling elite or political establishment for opposing war, however catastrophic. American imperialism, as the *World Socialist Web Site* anticipated in 2003, has a "rendezvous with disaster." Only the actions of the working class can prevent America's capitalists, their generals, and their spies from taking the rest of humanity with them.



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