

More to the Flight 752 Tragedy than First Appearances Suggest

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On 3 January 2020 a drone, believed to be operated by the United States, fired a missile upon a convoy of cars departing Baghdad airport, killing at least nine persons. Amongst the victims was Major General Qassem Solemani, a high ranking Iranian general who at the time of his murder was engaged in what is accurately described as a peace mission. He was carrying documents from the government of Saudi Arabia that are understood to have been peace proposals, including a possible cessation of Saudi military actions in the region.

The content of the documents has not been disclosed in detail, and in the flurry of events following Solemani's assassination, they have tended to disappear from the news cycle. If they were in fact proposals governing a possible ceasefire agreement, then there would be ample motivation for their disappearance.

It has been further suggested that the Saudi initiative was with the knowledge of and tacit consent of the Americans. If this is true, and again there has been a general silence on the point, then it would represent a new level of double-dealing by the Americans.

Trump certainly boasted about killing Solemani, although whether or not he was aware of the nature of Solemani's mission is another undisclosed detail. If he had such knowledge then the level of betrayal and double-dealing reached new heights, even by the amoral standards of United States foreign policy.

Following the assassination, Iran retaliated with precision strikes on two United States military targets in Iraq. Reports have suggested that the strikes were forewarned via the Swiss embassy with the result that the United States troops in the two targeted sites were moved to safety, resulting in no US casualties from the strike.

Again, there are conflicting reports, none of which make much sense. Some reports have suggested that the United States allowed the retaliation to explain the complete absence of any attempt at defence. Why go to the trouble of killing a senior Iranian officer (undoubtedly a war crime in the circumstances prevailing here) and then permit a free retaliation by the Iranians? It makes no logical or military sense.

The more logical explanation is that the much vaunted, and generally inaccurate, reports of the effectiveness of United States military defence was simply unable to respond effectively. The care taken by the Iranians to avoid human casualties, and the precision with which the targets were hit, was making a different point: nowhere within the Iranians range is safe.

Within hours of the Iranian's strike, a Ukraine airliner, carrying among others a large

contingent of Canadian citizens was shot down by the Iranian defence system close to Tehran. On the face of it, there was no logical reason for Iranian air defence to shoot down a civilian aircraft. The rush to blame Iran for the tragedy has tended to avoid analysis of several curious features as to what actually happened.

All civilian commercial aircraft carry an electronic system, the constant emission of signals from which identifies the plane as civilian and therefore prima facie not an object to be of concern. Precisely what happened to the aircraft's civilian transmission is at this stage unknown, but clearly something must have happened to it to cause the military defence system to fail to make the appropriate identification. Reports of the air defence system being on high alert etc simply make no rational sense as a reason for shooting down a civilian aircraft.

Something caused the ground defence system to mis-identify the plane and to fire its missiles. That the plane was experiencing a degree of difficulty before it was fired upon and had in fact turned away from its approved flight path reinforces the suspicion that it was experiencing difficulties before the air defence system was activated.

The complete absence of any reports of communication from the pilot to air-traffic control prior to the plane being shot down reinforces the suspicion that the plane was in fact experiencing difficulties before the air defence missile was fired.

Again, this is not rocket science. Something caused the pilot to change his flight path. The most obvious answer is electronic and/or mechanical failure. That same trouble prevented the pilot from communicating with air-traffic control. Whatever occurred to cause the plane trouble must also have damaged or disabled the aircraft's civil identification system.

Initial reports from the Iranian's air defence system describing the plane's transmitter identifying it as a civilian aircraft, as having ceased communications several minutes before the missiles were fired. Those missiles, known as TOR, by their Russian manufacturers, have an inbuilt system that enables them to identify friend or foe. These are obviously there to prevent any accidental shooting down of friendly civilian aircraft.

What is of material importance in the present case is that the capacity also exists for an unfriendly power to electronically hack both an aircraft and a missile defence system. The missiles used by the Iranian defence system have such a vulnerability. The logical inference to draw from the known sequence of events is that the Ukrainian airliner suffered a technical failure that caused it to alter course, probably intending to return to the airport.

The loss of radio contact and the non-functioning of its electronic identification system resulted in the defence system being unable to identify the aircraft as civilian. The big question which currently remains unanswered is whether the aircraft's electronic failure was an unfortunate mechanical defect or whether it was the result of malfeasance by an exterior actor.

The fact that the aircraft's scheduled departure was significantly delayed may have created a time opportunity for its electronic system to be sabotaged. The close proximity of the time of the Iranian's missile assault on the American targets in Iraq and the embarrassing failure of the Iranians air defence system stretches any belief in it being only a tragic coincidence beyond a rational limit.

In the context of the long ongoing warfare between Iran and the United States, it would be foolish to rule out the very real possibility that this was not a tragic accident but rather the inevitable result of an act of warfare of whom innocent civilians, not for the first time, are the main victims.

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