

Stumbling into Catastrophe

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There is a real danger for foreign policy advisors and analysts – and especially those they serve – when they are in a bubble, an echo chamber, and all of their conclusions are based on faulty inputs. Needless to say it's even worse when they believe they can [create their own reality](#) and invent outcomes out of whole cloth.

Things seldom go as planned in these circumstances.

President Trump was sold a bill of goods on the assassination of Iran's [revered](#) military leader, Qassim Soleimani, likely by a cabal around Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and the [long-discredited neocon](#) David Wurmser. A former Netanyahu advisor and Iraq war propagandist, Wurmser reportedly sent memos to his mentor, John Bolton, while Bolton was Trump's National Security Advisor (now, of course, he's the hero of the #resistance for having turned on his former boss) promising that killing Soleimani would be a cost-free operation that would catalyze the Iranian people against their government and bring about the long-awaited regime change in that country. The murder of Soleimani – the architect of the defeat of ISIS – would “rattle the delicate internal balance of forces and the control over them upon which the [Iranian] regime depends for stability and survival,” wrote Wurmser.

As is most often the case with neocons, he was dead wrong.

The operation was not cost-free. On the contrary. Assassinating Soleimani on Iraqi soil resulted in the Iraqi parliament – itself the product of our “bringing democracy” to the country – voting to expel US forces even as the vote by the people's representatives was roundly rejected by the people who brought the people the people's representatives. In a manner of speaking.

Trump's move had an effect opposite to the one promised by neocons. It did not bring Iranians out to the street to overthrow their government – it catalyzed opposition across Iraq's various political and religious factions to the continued US military presence and further tightened Iraq's relationship with Iran. And short of what would be a catastrophic war initiated by the US (with little or no support from allies), there is not a thing Trump can do about it.

Iran's retaliatory attack on two US bases in Iraq was initially sold by President Trump as merely a pin-prick. No harm, no foul, no injuries. This despite the fact that he must have known about US personnel injured in the attack. The reason for the lie was that Trump likely understands how devastating it would be to his presidency to escalate with Iran. So the truth began to trickle out slowly – 11 US military members were injured, but it was just “like a headache.” Now we know that 50 US troops were treated for traumatic brain injury after

the attack. This may not be the last of it – but don't count on the mainstream media to do any reporting.

The Iranian FARS news agency reported at the time of the attack that US personnel had been injured and the response by the US government was to completely take that media outlet off the Internet [by order of the US Treasury](#)!

Today the US House [voted](#) to cancel the 2002 authorization for war on Iraq and to prohibit the use of funds for war on Iran without Congressional authorization. It is a significant, if largely symbolic, move to rein in the oft-used excuse of the Iraq war authorization for blatantly unrelated actions like the assassination of Soleimani and Obama's [thousands of airstrikes on Syria and Iraq](#).

President Trump has argued that prohibiting funds for military action against Iran actually makes war more likely, as he would be restricted from the kinds of military-strikes-short-of-war like his attack on Syria after the alleged chemical attack in Douma in 2018 (claims which have recently [fallen apart](#)). The logic is faulty and reflects again the danger of believing one's own propaganda. As we have seen from the Iranian military response to the Soleimani assassination, Trump's military-strikes-short-of-war are having a ratchet-like effect rather than a pressure-release or deterrent effect.

As the financial and current events analysis site ZeroHedge [put it](#) recently:

[S]ince last summer's "tanker wars", Trump has painted himself into a corner on Iran, jumping from escalation to escalation (to this latest "point of no return big one" in the form of the ordered Soleimani assassination) — yet all the while hoping to avoid a major direct war. The situation reached a climax where there were "no outs" (Trump was left with two 'bad options' of either back down or go to war).

The Iranians have little to lose at this point and America's European allies are, even if impotent, fed up with the US obsession with Saudi Arabia and Israel as a basis for its Middle East policy.

So why open this essay with a photo of Trump celebrating his dead-on-arrival "Deal of The Century" for Israel and Palestine? Because this is once again a gullible and weak President Trump being led by the nose into the coming Middle East conflagration. Left without even a semblance of US sympathy for their plight, the Palestinians after the roll-out of this "peace" plan will again see that they have no friends outside Syria, Iran, and Lebanon. As Israel [continues to flirt with](#) the idea of simply annexing large parts of the West Bank, it is clear that the brakes are off of any Israeli reticence to push for maximum control over Palestinian territory. So what is there to lose?

Trump believes he's advancing peace in the Middle East, while the excellent Mondoweiss website rightly [observes](#) that a main architect of the "peace plan," Trump's own son-in-law Jared Kushner, "taunts Palestinians because he wants them to reject his 'peace plan.'" Rejection of the plan is a green light to a war of annihilation on the Palestinians.

It appears that the center may not hold, that the self-referential echo chamber that passes for Beltway "expert" analysis will again be caught off guard in the consequence-free profession that is neocon foreign policy analysis. "Gosh we didn't see that coming!" But the

next day they are back on the teevee stations as great experts.

Clouds gathering...

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