

## A War with Iran?

### Key Players

- Iran: Supreme Leader- Ayatollah Khamenei, President- Hassan Rouhani. Basically the Supreme Leader is the religious leader who is appointed to lead the nation by supervising the government, creating policies, and basically acting as the commander in chief. He also does a lot of appointing of key officials. The President is an elected official who runs the executive branch of their government but is the deputy commander in chief. The president answers to the Supreme Leader.



- Israel and Saudi Arabia: Both nations appear to be enthusiastic about the rising tensions given their disdain for Iran and their recent comments on the issue.
- General Chris Ghika: Top UK General in the American led \*OIR (Operation Inherent Resolve). Gen Ghika has told reporters that there was no increase threat from Iran backed forces in Iraq or Syria. \*OIR is the Operational name for the US led military intervention against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria

### Timeline:

- May 8, 2018 – The US decides to leave the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) aka the Iran Nuclear Deal.
- April 15, 2019 - The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (Iran's military unit) is designated as a foreign terrorist organization by President Trump. This is huge as it could give President Trump the authority to go to war with Iran via the 2001

Use of Force resolution. This would bypass the required Congressional approval to go to war. A legal argument would ensue over this for sure.

- Fun Fact: Tehran labeled US CENTCOM a terrorist organization in response. CENTCOM is the geographic combatant command for the middle east. Basically the US command element that directs what military operations happen in their area of responsibility in the middle east.
- May 6, 2019 - US Deploys Warships and Bombers to the Middle East. This was preplanned before all these shenanigans started but their deployment was slightly expedited as a show of force.
- May 8, 2019 – President Hassan Routhani announces Iran will continue its Nuclear program.
- May 12, 2019 – Four Tankers damaged (2 Saudi, 1 UAE, 1 Norway), allegedly by Iran
- May 13, 2019 – The US issues warnings against travel to Iran
- May 14, 2019 – The US says Iran is likely behind attacks on Saudi Oil facilities
- May 14, 2019 – Gen Ghika interviews with reporters stating he does not know of an increased threat from Iran (see above key players)
- May 15, 2019 – US Pulls non-emergency staff from Iraq
- May 16, 2019 – Saudi Arabia accuses Iran of ordering attacks on pipelines
- May 18, 2019 – American Diplomats warn that commercial airliners of potentially being misidentified in the Persian Gulf Area.

## Context

From a security standpoint Iran is 1 of 4 countries that the US focuses on, the other 3 being China, Russia, and N Korea. Each of the 4 carry their own different set of security risks. For China, we have the trade war. Russia has a near peer military. Lastly North Korea is an emerging nuclear power. So why does Iran garner so much attention? While Iran has been trying to develop nuclear weapons for some time, the main reason it is perceived as a threat is the Iranian Threat Network or ITN. The ITN is a compilation of non-state actors, terrorist groups, and militias, most notably Hezbollah and Hamas, that are supported by Iran. The ITN is how Iran projects their power and influence in the middle east as experienced most recently in Syria and Yemen.

## Background

So last May 8, 2018 we left the JCPOA. President Trump campaigned on this and once in office, he enacted his plan to leave the JCPOA. Even though we left the JCPOA, Iran and several European nations remained in the deal. Iran was expecting the European

nations involved to fill the void left by the US as the Iran Nuclear deal was originally put in place to rebuild Iran's economy after it was degraded due to US Sanctions. Fast forward to 2019 and the US sanctions wavers are set to expire in May 2019. Prior to this date coming about, President Trump decides to label the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a foreign terrorist organization. Side note: The Iranian military is basically comprised of two main groups: The paramilitary force IRGC and their Conventional force. This is incredibly controversial. This is uncharted territory. We don't know what the second and third order effects are for naming a state actor a foreign terrorist organization. This can easily lead to an escalation with Iran. Following this designation, on May 8, 2019 The President of Iran Hassan Routhani began to test the limits of the JCPOA as he announced that Iran would begin developing its nuclear program again. Prior to this The IAEA International Atomic energy agency confirmed that Iran had been implementing the nuclear provisions required of the JCPOA but now Iran is vocal about pursuing its nuclear program. President Hassan Routhani on May 8<sup>th</sup> stated that Iran would begin to develop its nuclear capabilities again. President Trump retaliates to this news by furthering his efforts to curb Iranian oil sells. This background sets the stage for the damaged oil tankers and the perceived threats against US forces in Iraq.....

Amidst the US attempts to curb Iranian oil sells, on May 12, 2019 four Tankers, 1 UAE, 1 Norway, and 2 Saudi Arabian owned, were damaged via explosive charges near the port of Fujairah. According to a US assessment of the incident, Iran, or one of its proxies, allegedly was behind the attack. A Norwegian insurer has conducted an investigation as well and appears to validate the claim made by the US. The Norwegian investigations claims the high-grade explosives were delivered underwater via drones. The materials are similar to those used in Yemen by the Houthis. The Iranian Supreme leader Ayatollah Khamenei denied the claim that Iran was behind the attack and stated that Tehran doesn't want a war. The Supreme leaders main claim was that it doesn't make sense for Iran to go to war with the US because it would not be in either side's best interest. He instead raised up the possibility that a possible sabotage is at play. Asymmetric warfare methods always leave room for plausible deniability so it is unclear if the claims on either side can ever be truly discovered outside of a "smoking gun" piece of evidence. Iran has previously threatened to block the passage of oil through Strait of Hormuz. The destruction of these tankers may be Iran's way of sending a message to the US and its allies that the freedom to navigate the waters in this strait and the nearby waters is under their control. 1/5<sup>th</sup> of the oil in the world passes through this strait. If it is true that Iran damaged these tankers as a message to the world, it can be perceived as a response to the Trump organization's interference into their oil export operations.

Also, during this time US intelligence officials report that they received HUMINT (Human intelligence) that the threat from Iran included possible kidnapping and killing of US Soldiers. Texas Republican Rep Michael McCaul (ranking republican on the House foreign affairs committee) told USA TODAY that the HUMINT information is what

prompted Trump to deploy an aircraft carrier, along with B-52 bombers and other military forces to the middle east. US intelligence officials also allegedly learned that the head of Iran's QUD's Force (a sub unit under the Iranian Military) met with Iran's proxy forces to discuss an escalation of force against American Forces. The same call to target Americans was also allegedly shared with Hezbollah, an Iranian sponsored terrorist group previously mentioned as a group under the ITN (Iranian Threat Network). The issue is that there are reports that state the intelligence report may have been misinterpreted and that a domino effect of countermeasures and responses are escalating over misinterpretations of data.

It is possible that John Bolton and those of his ilk in the Trump administration could be attempting to corner Iran into doing something impulsive and foolish. A wrong move on the part of the Iranians could be justification needed to go to war with Iran. It appears that pieces are being moved on the board to set up a situation where both countries are forced to contend with each other through direct military confrontation. A situation akin to the Gulf of Tonkin may be brewing here. Throughout the tough rhetoric coming out of Washington, Saudi Arabia, and Israel, many of our other allies are calling for a de-escalation. Russia has also expressed a desire to see the situation become diffused and has publicly stated it will work with China and Europe to identify a way ahead. The talk of deploying 100,000+ troops to the middle east to counter Iran seems to be tough rhetoric at this point but if we are not careful, we could find ourselves in another conflict that spans another decade of war.

Given that John Bolton has the ear of the President may be cause for concern as he could be stating a case for preemptive strikes against Iran for a perceived possible threat. This doesn't make too much sense since the US has shifted towards focusing their military preparations towards near peer threats, namely Russia and China. In regards to negotiation talks, the Iranian President Hassan Routhani is against negotiations at this time (he refers to it as poison). However, his foreign minister Zarif His government officials foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif stated that negotiations could occur if the US would consider rejoining the JCPOA. From their perspective, coming to the negotiation table now without the US willing to re-enter the JCPOA would just make Iran appear weak.

Key Takeaways:

- 1) The second and third order effects of leaving the JCPOA are being felt right now. A Libertarian approach to free trade and a less foreign interventionist mindset could have prevented an event like this occurring.
- 2) We have established a dangerous precedent by giving the president the authority to deploy troops into combat environments under the supposition that it is against a terrorist group. If an adversary's military organization can be labeled a terrorist

organization then there is no longer a need to acquire congressional approval to go to war. Through a game of semantics, Congress has relinquished one of their most important responsibilities. Making it easier for our nation to enter into wars, renamed conflicts, is just another example on how our foreign intervention policy is only degrading even more.

- 3) Warfare is not merely the use of military might. Also, the escalation of force against our adversary's economic infrastructure has the potential to lead into military conflict. If we are not careful, we can back a nation into the corner and cause them to do something rash and lead to a boots on the ground conflict. Similar to the gulf of Tonkin. And just like the start of the Vietnam war we may go into thinking our technological advances will win the day but that is not always true. We play a dangerous game when we assume military dominance over our opponents. From a libertarian perspective, we should not be engaging in these conflicts period but even from a military perspective, we cannot just assume victory nor can we assume that we can continue to utilize our military in this manner without repercussions, blowback, and unintended consequences. \*Side note, the Pentagon did a war games style simulation mixing in computer simulations and some live fire operations to see what would happen if a navy similar to Iran's came up against the US navy fleet in the area. Despite our superior technologically advanced fleet, the notional opposing force quickly did considerable damage to the fleet through unconventional means that they were more than capable of accomplishing in real life.

## MISC

AUMF excerpt: "nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons, in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States by such nations, organizations or persons."



If Iran didn't want to go to war then why did they put their country right next to our bases.....



I couldn't resist putting in at least one trump tweet.....

\*Side note\* This year the war in Afghanistan will be old enough to vote : /

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