

# As Conflict with Iran Escalates, Path to Peace Can be Found

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Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)  
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*The recent escalation of conflict between the United States and Iran threatens another US military quagmire that would create crisis and chaos in Iran, the region and perhaps globally as well as costing the US trillions of dollars. The US needs to change course — a deeply wrong course it has been on regarding Iran since the 1950s, escalating since Iran declared its independence in their 1979 Revolution. There is a path out of this situation, but it requires leadership from President Trump, which will only come if the people of the United States mobilize to demand it.*



Peace Delegation to Iran at the Iranian Foreign Ministry, February 2019. Photograph from CODE PINK.

## The Trump Story Of Last Minute Decision Not To Attack Iran, Doubted

The story repeated in the corporate media, including the New York Times, Washington, Post, CNN, ABC News, and others is that President Trump called off a military attack on Iran at the last moment because he was told that 150 Iranians could be killed. It is evident [this was the story being pushed by the White House](#). Initially, the story was that Trump stopped the bombing with ten minutes to spare, while the planes were already in the air. On Sunday, the story changed to Trump was asked for a decision by the Pentagon a half hour before the attack and said ‘no’ to the attack because he was told about civilian casualties.

This story is being doubted by many. [Even on FOX News](#), two of its leading

broadcasters, Shepard Smith and Chris Wallace, said Trump's story of stopping the attack at the last moment, "does not hold water" and "something is wrong here." They talked with former military officials and said it was highly unlikely that the president would not have been told of the likely casualties from the possible military scenarios.

Did President Trump really think the US could drop bombs on Iran and not kill people? [Trump broke the record for bombs dropped in Afghanistan](#) when in 2018 he dropped more than 5,200 bombs. The UN found that in 2019, the US and its allies were [responsible for the majority of civilian deaths](#) in Afghanistan. In 2017, President Trump loosened the rules on drone strikes causing a significant [escalation in drone strikes](#). The US and its allies dropped more than [20,000 bombs](#) in 2017 in Syria, reducing cities to [literal rubble](#). With this record, how can anyone believe Trump was worried about a potential 150 deaths in Iran?

And, bombs are not the only way President Trump kills people. Economic coercive measures (aka sanctions) in Venezuela put in place by President Trump in August 2017 have [resulted in 40,000 deaths](#). In Iran, Trump has escalated sanctions to choke the economy and create hardship for the Iranian people. [Sanctions are as deadly as war](#) but are worse because people find them to be more palatable than bombs.

If it was not a concern for the death of civilians, why did Trump not bomb Iran in response to the drone being shot down?

### **Iran Shows it can Defend Itself Against a US Military Attack**

One concern about the destruction of the US drone is whether it was over Iranian airspace when it was destroyed. Iran maintains that it was in their airspace. The US claims it was in international air space, but the [US lacks credibility](#) when it makes such claims. Perhaps one reason Trump has not acted is he knows Iran was within its rights.

Iran reports that they did not shoot down the drone until after giving several warnings to the United States. Major General Hossein Salami of the Revolutionary Guard [said](#), "The downing of the US drone had an explicit, decisive and clear message that defenders of the Islamic Iran's borders will show decisive and knockout reactions to aggression against this territory by any alien."

[According to Reuters](#), Amirali Hajizadeh, the head of the Revolutionary Guard's aerospace division, said that a manned US Boeing P-8 Poseidon surveillance plane was also in Iranian airspace at the same time as the drone. Iran decided not to shoot it down because there were 35 people on board. Hajizadeh said, the US "plane also entered our airspace and we could have shot it down, but we did not."

[Reuters also reported](#) that Iran received a message from the United States through Oman that a military strike was imminent and that Trump was against any war with Iran but wanted to talk to Iran about various issues. Iran responded: "We made it clear that the leader is against any talks, but the message will be conveyed to him to make a decision ... However, we told the Omani official that any attack against Iran will have regional and international consequences."

Iran shot down the drone with a Surface to Air Missile that was an [Iranian-produced defense system](#). This illustrates that a military conflict with the Islamic Republic would be very challenging for the United States. The Center for Strategic and International Studies reports

that Iran has the largest and most diverse missile arsenal in the Middle East. Tehran views missile defense as vital against Washington's aggression. The missile attack on the US drone shows Iran has aerial defense capability.

[Military Times reports how difficult war with Iran would be](#) writing, "Iranian coastal defenses would likely render the entire Persian Gulf off-limits to U.S. Navy warships. Iran's advanced surface-to-air missile defenses would be a significant threat to U.S. pilots. And Iran's arsenal of ballistic missiles and cruise missiles put U.S. military installations across the U.S. Central Command region at risk. The cost in U.S. casualties could be high."

The big problem for the United States is it simply does not have the military power to keep the Strait of Hormuz open, 30% of the world's oil supply transits the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz. Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces, Major General Mohammad Baqeri, [stated reality clearly](#): "If the Islamic Republic of Iran were determined to prevent export of oil from the Persian Gulf, that determination would be realized in full and announced in public, in view of the power of the country and its Armed Forces."

[Pepe Escobar explains](#) the Iranian border of the Persian Gulf is lined up with anti-ship missiles and Iran's [ballistic missiles](#) are capable of hitting "carriers in the sea" with precision. He explains that blocking the Strait would dramatically increase oil prices and detonate "the \$1.2 quadrillion derivatives market; and that would collapse the world banking system, crushing the world's \$80 trillion GDP and causing an unprecedented depression."

Iran's allies in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Afghanistan are ready for joint operations in response to a US military war against Iran. [According to Elijah J. Magnier](#), they are prepared and on alert at the highest level. Joint operations will begin from the moment they are necessary. According to sources, Iran's allies will open fire against already agreed on objectives in an organized, orchestrated, synchronized and graduated response, anticipating a war that may last many months. The US will face war on many fronts very quickly.

The US lacks international support for a military attack on Iran. Russia, China, the European Union, and other major powers have called for de-escalation. A military attack on Iran would lead to a quagmire that could take a decade or more and end in defeat for the United States, destruction in Iran and chaos in the region. The [US has spent more than \\$7 trillion since the beginning of the Iraq War](#) and Iran is larger in geography and population as well as having a better military. The United States cannot afford another \$7+ trillion dollar war for another decade. It would be an economic and military disaster that would further isolate the United States.



Peace Delegation to Iran visits the Tehran Peace Museum 2019. Photograph from Popular Resistance.

## Iran in Context and a Path Out of the US-Created Debacle

In our conversation on the [Clearing the FOG podcast](#), which will air Monday, June 24, conflict resolution expert, Patrick Hiller, explained how sometimes to resolve a conflict, the conflict must be heightened. The US conflict with Iran is escalating in dangerous ways where perhaps both sides can see that the path to war will produce no winners and could be the greatest foreign policy error in US history.

President Trump can be the hero as the US heads into 2020 presidential elections but it will require him to stop listening to National Security Advisor, John Bolton and Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, who both want war with Iran. Their advice is the opposite of President Trump's criticism of war during his last campaign. They have teamed up to undermine Trump's negotiations with North Korea, prevent the withdrawal of US troops from Syria, led him into a failed coup in Venezuela and now to the brink of war with Iran. Trump would be wise to replace both Bolton and Pompeo.

The idiocy of Pompeo was shown this week when he claimed Iran's actions "should be understood in the context of 40 years of unprovoked aggression." Is Pompeo really that [ignorant of history](#)?

Popular Resistance has often reported on the US overthrow of the democratically-elected government of Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh in August 1953. The [CIA has confirmed its role](#) in this coup as has the [US State Department](#). This coup [ended Iran's brief experience with a secular democracy](#). If that democracy had been allowed to flourish, the story of the Middle East would have been very different than the war, chaos and brutal governments we have seen since that time. Mossadegh was followed by the US puppet, [the Shah, who brutally ruled the country](#) until the Iranian Revolution of 1979.

After the Iranian Revolution, the [US encouraged and supported](#) the eight-year Iraq War against Iran with money, naval assistance, and weapons. The US [provided Iraq with the ingredients for chemical weapons](#) as well as intelligence on where to use them. More than one million people were killed and more than 80,000 were injured by chemical weapons in the war.

The US also killed 290 Iranians, including 66 children, when a [US missile shot down a commercial Iranian airliner in July 1988](#). The US has never apologized for this mass killing of civilians. The US has imposed aggressive economic sanctions against Iran since they declared their independence and has consistently escalated those sanctions in an attempt to destroy their economy. And, the US has spent millions of dollars to build opposition inside Iran to the Iranian government as well as working with the opposition, MEK, [secretly trained](#) by the US military, which is branded a terrorist group by Iran (and used to be designated a terrorist group by the US).

The [US has imposed economic sanctions](#) since 1980 when the US broke diplomatic relations with Iran. President Carter put in place sanctions including freezing \$12 billion in Iranian assets and banning imports of Iranian oil. The economic war and the illegal unilateral coercive measures have been escalated by every president, including by President Trump when he violated the carefully negotiated nuclear agreement. Iran's Foreign Minister [Zarif painstakingly negotiated the 2015 Iran Nuclear Deal](#) between China, France, Russia, the UK, Germany, and the European Union for more than a decade. Instead of abiding by the agreement, the [US violated it and escalated sanctions against Iran](#).

The US is also [fomenting rebellion](#). The Trump administration has been seeking [regime change through various actions including violence](#). Trump created a [Mission Center in the CIA](#) focused on regime change in Iran and [spends millions of dollars](#) to encourage opposition in Iran, [working to manipulate protests](#) to support a US agenda.

The path out of this mess is for President Trump to lead. He needs to acknowledge this history and the mistakes of his advisors, Bolton and Pompeo, rejoin the nuclear agreement, abide by it by lifting the illegal US sanctions and promise to abide by international law. It will take positive actions by the United States to make up for decades of aggressive abuses against Iran to bring Iran to the table of diplomacy.

If these steps are taken, a positive relationship based on mutual respect can be developed between the US and Iran. It is the job of the peace movement and all those who seek stability and justice in the world to work toward this outcome.

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**Kevin Zeese** and **Margaret Flowers** co-direct [Popular Resistance](#) where this article was originally published.

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