

Trump Foreign Policy in Turmoil

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Global Research, February 07, 2017

Region: [Middle East & North Africa, Russia and FSU, USA](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

In-depth Report: [IRAN: THE NEXT WAR?, UKRAINE REPORT](#)

Within days of the flawed roll-out for Trump's Executive Orders regarding [Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements](#) and [Enhancing Public Safety in the Interior of the United States](#), the President's promises on the campaign trail and his Inaugural Address that the US would not pursue regime change or initiate new foreign interventions and that his administration would pursue a new foreign policy based on engagement, have been called into question.

The week began with President Trump praising, as a success, the administration's first attack on al Qaeda in Yemen which inexplicably included special ops from [UAE](#). Reports state that the group of Navy Seals unexpectedly walked into an [hour long fire fight](#) which contained elements of an ambush including hand grenades and a certain amount of panic with indiscriminate gunfire; leaving one Navy Seal dead with several injured, at least a dozen civilians dead including an eight year old girl and destroyed a \$75 million Osprey – you might say the raid was more of the same kind of failure with which the US military has some long-standing familiarity. [Black Hawk Down](#) in 1993 comes to mind.

Described by Trump press secretary Sean Spicer as a “[very, very well-thought out and executed](#) raid”, the mission began on November 7 when the Pentagon presented President Obama with a plan. From there, the proposed raid went through all the necessary channels arriving in front of Trump Defense Secretary James Mattis on January 24th. Mattis approved and forwarded the plan to the White House for the President's approval which he gave the next day at a dinner which included several key staff members including special assistants to the White House Jared Kushner and Steve Bannon and after consulting with National Security Advisor General Michael Flynn.

All of the reviews and approvals, however, did not guarantee success as there is reason to believe that the alQ stronghold was expecting an American raid with [armed female](#) and AQ snipers on a rooftop. After the raid, anonymous [U.S. military officials told Reuters](#) that “Trump approved his first covert counterterrorism operation *without sufficient intelligence, ground support or adequate backup preparations.*” In addition, Reuters quoted three unnamed US military officials that “the attacking SEAL team found itself dropped into a *reinforced al Qaeda base defended by landmines, snipers, and a larger than expected contingent of heavily armed Islamist extremists.*” This does not sound like a surprise raid but more like a disaster waiting to happen.

These [unprecedented 'leaks'](#) indicate an undercutting of the Administration by anonymous military officials who are in direct contradiction to the timeline as presented by Spicer that

the entire plan had been appropriately vetted by the government's foreign policy structure – with the exception of Rex Tillerson who had not yet been confirmed as Secretary of State.

It has been said that the mission needed to receive a green light to take advantage of a Moonless night and that the mission was to acquire certain computer hard drives with speculation that there was some urgency of obtaining the intel contained potentially embarrassing data regarding the interconnections between the terrorists and certain foreign nation which support terrorists. In any case, it was a [botched mission](#) that was poorly planned and executed and appears to have a major security problem given the unauthorized disclosures by anonymous military officials who disagreed about what the public has been told about the raid. So which is it – was the raid properly vetted and the right questions asked – or was it insufficiently vetted?

US CommCentral [released the clip](#) that they say was obtained from a series of videos during the raid which shows a black hooded individual giving instructions on how to make a do-it-yourself bomb. The clip, which has no audio and its written instructions are written in perfect English, is now reported to be a [decade old](#) AQ training video. One suspects that the President's Monday trip to Central Command and Special Ops in Florida was not just a get-to-know-you visit.

As if that were not enough faux pas for the week, [General Flynn](#) took an unprecedented place on center stage at a press conference sounding like the Commandant of Stalag 19, stridently warning Iran and spouting old, worn out rhetoric that the “Trump administration condemns such actions by Iran that undermines security, prosperity and stability throughout and beyond the Middle East which places American lives at risk. As of today, we are officially putting Iran on notice.”

The accusations came after Iran reportedly fired a test of a [medium-range ballistic missile](#) on February 1st with Iranian Defense Minister Hossein Dehghan stating that “The test did not violate the nuclear deal or (U.N.) Resolution 2231” and that “..we will not allow foreigners to interfere in our defence affairs,” striking a chord with Trump's Inaugural statement that “it is the right of all nations to put their own interests first.”

On the heels of Flynn's rant, the Trump administration quickly announced [economic sanctions](#) on twenty five Iranian individuals and entities that have unnecessarily escalated tensions with:

“The Islamic Republic of Iran is the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism and engages in and supports violent activities that destabilize the Middle East.”

“The Trump Administration will no longer tolerate Iran's provocations that threaten our interests. “

“The days of turning a blind eye to Iran's hostile and belligerent actions toward the United States and the world community are over.”

The Flynn/Trump [obsession against Iran](#) has little basis in rational thought and is not the kind of nation-building and “forming of new alliances” that the President promised in his Inaugural address. One reason Flynn may be myopic on the subject of Iran is that they

supported the [insurgents in Iraq](#) during the US invasion in 2003 but he may also be blowing smoke with the realization that the administration must know that any serious effort to eliminate 'radical islamic terrorists' will be dependent upon Iran's participation.

As Ron Paul has repeatedly suggested, Iran has every reason to want its own nuclear capability, if only as a defensive mechanism to protect itself from Israel and the US. A spokesperson for the [EU foreign policy chief](#) in Brussels said that the "Iranian ballistic missile program was not part of the 2015 nuclear pact and hence the tests are not a violation of it."

On February 3rd, **President Trump tweeted "[Iran is playing with fire](#)** – they don't appreciate how "kind" President Obama was to them. Not me!" to which Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif tweeted "*We will never, I repeat never, use our weapons against anyone, except in self-defense.* Let us see if any of those who complain can make the same statement."

If the Trump Administration believes Iran is in violation of the Plan, they have the option to initiate a dispute resolution process or to engage the [International Atomic Energy Agency](#) (IAEA) which has regular access to all Iranian nuclear facilities to verify that Iran is in compliance. Iran says it [will impose its own sanctions](#) and release its own list of US-related 'entities' entwined with supporting terrorists.

With an imminent visit to the US, it is not outside the realm of possibility that all this Tough on Iran talk is to impress Bibi [Netanyahu who hailed Flynn's statement](#) with "Iranian aggression must not go unanswered" which sounds reminiscent of Sen. John McCain. As if to tone down the US inflammatory reaction, new [Defense Secretary James Mattis](#) said he sees 'no need to increase number of troops in the Middle East' in response to the Iranian missile crisis.

Of special interest will be how Trump deals with whatever demands Netanyahu has in his pocket and how Trump's high regard for Israel may be affected, assuming that he is already apprised of Israel's role in funding ISIS in Syria and its support and participation in fomenting terrorist actions throughout the Middle East. If Flynn/Trump are concerned with who is causing instability in the Middle East, they have no further to look than Saudi Arabia and Israel. It is difficult to image that Trump does not already have an appreciation for Netanyahu's expectation to continue to run the show otherwise known as US foreign policy.

As if the Trump foreign policy objectives had not already experienced a week of upsets, contradictions and overall confusion, UN Ambassador Niki Haley's diatribe against Russia was stunning in its [vitriolic attack](#) on Russia alleging "*aggressive actions of Russia*" and "*dire situation in eastern Ukraine is one that demands clear and strong condemnation of Russian actions.*" In addition, Haley asserted, in contradiction to President Trump's previous position on the Crimea that "*The United States continues to condemn and call for an immediate end to the Russian occupation of Crimea*" and that "*Crimea is a part of Ukraine. Our Crimea-related sanctions will remain in place until Russia returns control of the peninsula to Ukraine.*"

In his February 3rd press conference, Trump press secretary [backed up Haley](#) with "I think Ambassador Haley made it very clear of our concern with Russia's occupation of Crimea. We are not — and so I think she spoke very forcefully and clearly on that."

Russia's [UN Ambassador Vitaly Churkin](#) responded that 'the belligerent rhetoric toward Moscow over the Ukrainian crisis is nothing new' and that "it is Kiev that has escalated the situation there". He also cited "OSCE reports and surveillance data which places the blame squarely on the Ukrainian government and not the rebel forces."

After the initial shock at Haley's level of hostility, an immediate reaction was that as a former Republican Governor of South Carolina, Haley had to have a working relationship with Senator Lindsay Graham (R-SC), the alter ego of Sen. John McCain who remains an irrational proponent of intervention wherever possible around the globe and that her maiden speech before the Security Council had somehow gone askew as a more combative, divisive script found its way into her file.

However, U.N. ambassador Nikki Haley, [met with her Ukrainian counterpart](#) "to reaffirm the United States' support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine," according to a statement.

In view of another pending humanitarian disaster as a result of US intervention in Ukraine, the best that the State Department could do, prior to Tillerson taking office, was to issue a statement [calling for a ceasefire](#) and return to implementation of the Minsk Agreement

It is reported, though unconfirmed, that soon after her speech, Haley visited Russian Ambassador Churkin at his home, presumably to reassure him that there was a bureaucratic snafu and that US policy toward Russia was not accurately reflected in her introductory remarks.

As a result of a week of significant snafus, the Trump Administration has either caved in to neo-con pressure like Eliot Abrams (convicted of lying to Congress during Iran-Contra) who is currently vying for the Deputy Secretary position at the State Department or they are dealing with repeated staff blunders and turmoil that are seriously threatening any hope of credibility for Trump's oft-stated foreign policy goals.

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