

Trump Threatens Iran to Distract From Russia Criticism and Appease Israel

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Donald Trump's all-caps tweet threatening Iran with "CONSEQUENCES THE LIKES OF WHICH FEW THROUGHOUT HISTORY HAVE EVER SUFFERED BEFORE" sounds much like his warning last fall that North Korea would be "met with fire and fury like the world has never seen."

Will Trump deliver on his threats against Iran, but not against North Korea? There is a striking disconnect between his policies toward the two countries.

"Trump has rejected a detailed pact that kept Iran out of the nuclear weapons business for a decade, while embracing a vague communiqué that allows North Korea to keep its nuclear weapons for years, and possibly forever," said **Richard N. Haass**, president of the Council on Foreign Relations, [offering his assessment](#) of Trump's decision to pull out of the Iran nuclear deal last May.

Under the [nuclear deal](#) negotiated by the Obama administration, Iran and five other countries, Iran had gotten rid of all of its highly enriched uranium, eliminated 99 percent of its low-enriched uranium and shut down a main nuclear reactor. Iran had fully complied with all of the requests of the UN International Atomic Energy Agency, which had affirmed eight times that Iran was in compliance with the nuclear deal.

Trump is now desperate to deflect criticism away from his much-criticized summit with Russian president **Vladimir Putin**. Trump knows that a war — conducted with the right spin — could help the GOP in the midterm elections. And Israel, the United States' closest ally, has been [gunning for regime change](#) in Iran, which Israel considers to be an existential threat.

Trump Is Desperate to Change the Subject Away From Russia

Trump is likely threatening Iran to distract from the widespread outrage at his adoption of Putin's denial that Russia interfered in the 2016 election. In siding with Putin, Trump rejected the conclusion of the US intelligence agencies that Russia tampered with the election.

"Other people who know Mr. Trump said his decision to respond [to Iran] in

such fiery terms was driven almost entirely by his search for a distraction from questions about Russia,” according to New York Times [reporter Mark Landler](#).

Landler identifies three reasons Trump will not likely follow the same strategy with North Korea and Iran: 1) Iran’s leadership is not as monolithic as North Korea’s, with **Kim Jong Un** as a one-man state; 2) the strong Israel lobby opposes diplomacy with Iran; and 3) Trump’s unilateral withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal provides Iran with little incentive to negotiate, particularly because the other parties to the deal — Britain, France, Germany, China and Russia — continue to abide by the pact.

Moreover, Trump is playing to his base. **Christopher R. Hill**, who worked as a diplomat in both Republican and Democratic administrations, [said](#) Trump’s rhetoric against Iran is “raw meat” for his base, as well as “an effort to shift the subject” away from his summit with Putin.

Trump Responds to Israeli Pressure on Iran

Although Israel has enjoyed the [unwavering support](#) of successive US administrations, Trump has taken that support to a new and disturbing level.

Israel strongly opposed the Iran nuclear deal and [pushed](#) for the United States to bomb Iran. Trump pulled out of the deal, leaving Iran free to build its nuclear program.

Trump then capitulated to Israeli pressure, declaring Jerusalem the capital of Israel, in spite of Security Council [resolutions](#) mandating that the status of Jerusalem be agreed upon by the parties through negotiation. Trump’s declaration led to predictable outrage around the world.

A Full-Court Press Against Iran

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and **National Security Adviser John Bolton** have also been rattling the sabers against Iran.

In a speech to the Heritage Foundation, Pompeo listed [12 demands](#) Iran must meet, including cessation of uranium enrichment for peaceful purposes, which is allowed under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.

“The demands would constitute a complete transformation by Iran’s government, and they hardened the perception that what Trump’s administration really seeks is a change in the Iranian regime,” [according to The Associated Press](#).

Bolton, who has long advocated overthrowing Iran’s government, [promises](#) regime change in Iran by the end of 2018.

The United States has also mounted a disinformation campaign intended to undermine Iran’s government.

“The Trump administration has launched an offensive of speeches and online communications meant to foment unrest and help pressure Iran to end its

nuclear program and its support of militant groups, US officials familiar with the matter said," [according to the Jerusalem Post](#). "The current and former officials said the campaign paints Iranian leaders in a harsh light, at times using information that is exaggerated or contradicts other official pronouncements, including comments by previous administrations."

Trump Plans Air War Against Iran; House Says Not Without Our Consent

The Trump administration is moving toward war with Iran. **Eric Margolis**, veteran war correspondent in the Middle East, [reports](#) that the Pentagon has drawn up plans for an air attack on Iran:

The Pentagon has planned a high-intensity air war against Iran that Israel and the Saudis might very well join. The plan calls for over 2,300 air strikes against Iranian strategic targets: airfields and naval bases, arms and petroleum, oil and lubricant depots, telecommunication nodes, radar, factories, military headquarters, ports, water works, airports, missile bases and units of the Revolutionary Guards.

Likewise, senior officials in the Australian government [told ABC](#) they think the United States plans to bomb Iran's nuclear facilities, maybe as soon as next month.

But the House of Representatives just passed the [National Defense Authorization Act of 2019](#), which includes an amendment stating that "nothing in this Act may be construed to authorize the use of forces against Iran" and an attached statement indicating "the conferees are not aware of any information that would justify the use of military force against Iran under any other statutory authority."

Even if the Senate approves that amendment, Trump won't necessarily follow Congress's mandate. He might say he's going after suspected Iranian "terrorists" inside Iran or anywhere on his global battlefield. We will then see if there is any congressional pushback.

At the same time, however, Trump is talking about making a deal with Iran.

"We're ready to make a real deal," he [declared](#). Trump said he is willing to meet with Iranian **President Hassan Rouhani** with "no preconditions."

But the Iran deal Trump renounced took years of painstaking negotiations.

Meanwhile, Russia is allied with Iran and would oppose US military intervention. On July 12, Putin [met](#) with **Ali Akbar Velayati**, foreign policy adviser to Iran's supreme leader, outside Moscow.

Feigning Concern for the Iranian People

Trump claims to care about the people in Iran, but the economic sanctions he reinstated while pulling out of the Iran deal will hurt the Iranian people. As CODEPINK co-director **Medea Benjamin** [wrote](#):

Many Iranians we talk to desperately want to change their government, but not

with U.S. intervention. They look around the region in horror, seeing how U.S. militarism has contributed to massive chaos, misery, and death in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, Yemen, and Palestine. They believe their best option is internal reform.

There is another glaring difference between the situations in Iran and North Korea. While Iran does not have nuclear weapons, North Korea does. That is North Korea's insurance policy against US military aggression.

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Michel Chossudovsky

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