

The US vs. Iran: Who Won and Who Lost?

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Iran's symbolic missile strike against two US bases in Iraq was a soft power victory for the Islamic Republic despite not causing any casualties, though the US undoubtedly achieved a military victory by assassinating Maj. Gen. Soleimani in Baghdad last week, with this superficial "tit-for-tat" outcome being used by both sides to de-escalate tensions away from a destructive conventional war.

Iran literally shocked the world by responding to the US' assassination of Maj. Gen. Soleimani in Baghdad last week through the most direct means possible, namely a ballistic missile strike against two American bases in Iraq in the early hours of Wednesday morning. People all across the planet were on the edge of their seats for over half a day wondering how the US' unpredictable president would react following his threat to [target 52 Iranian sites](#) — including cultural ones — if Americans were killed by Iran's promised response. Prior to Trump's [globally broadcast speech](#), many were [\(ridiculously\) worried](#) that World War III was about to break out, or at the very least the complete obliteration of Iran, but all sincere well-wishers of world peace breathed a collective sigh of relief when he revealed that no Americans were injured in the attack despite [Iran claiming that 80 lost their lives](#), which is why he didn't order a counter-strike. This almost completely unexpected result deserves to be analyzed in depth in order to get down to the bottom of how it all played out, as well as to better understand the US and Iran's extremely different definitions of victory after both claimed that they came out of this superficial "tit-for-tat" exchange as the winner. It's ultimately up to the reader themselves to decide which of the two really won, but this analysis aims to make their final assessment much easier.

It's [since been revealed](#) that the Iranians notified the Iraqi Prime Minister before launching their salvo, after which his government's officials informed their American counterparts in order to avoid any injuries before the strike actually commenced. One might argue that Tehran did this in order to "respect international law" after launching an attack on its neighbor's territory, but it's unrealistic to believe that the Islamic Republic would risk losing the element of surprise if it really intended to kill Americans and cross Trump's threatened red line. Despite spreading discredited reports that 80 Americans were killed as a result and then claiming that this amounted to a "[slap in the face](#)" of its rival, it appears from satellite footage that Iran [deliberately avoided](#) targeting facilities in the two bases that were housing US and Iraqi troops, if they even were still there by the time the strike actually happened after being indirectly tipped off by none other than the Iranians themselves. These facts demonstrate that Iran didn't want to truly escalate tensions with the US but nevertheless felt compelled to respond in a dramatic way to "save face", hence why it took the utmost caution not to kill any Americans but still showed that it technically could have if its precision-guided missiles were programmed to do so.

From the American side of things, the author wrote the following last week in his article titled "[No, A War With Iran Won't Help Trump Win Re-Election](#)": "If events quickly climb the escalation ladder, then both Iran and possibly even Trump himself might end up the losers, with only the Democrats and the US' military-industrial complex cynically emerging as the 'winners' (since '[Israel](#)' might be wiped out by Iran before the Islamic Republic is destroyed). In hindsight, this makes one wonder who ordered Iran's militant removal from Iraq in the first place and whether it was a 'deep state' plot to entrap Trump by provoking this very scenario." Since neither Trump nor the Ayatollah wanted to risk that mutually detrimental outcome of the former possibly losing re-election and the latter's country likely being destroyed, their Iraqi "deconfliction channel" was relied upon to choreograph Iran's carefully planned response in order for both sides to claim victory and thus pull away from the brink of what would otherwise probably have been the bloodiest war in the Mideast's history. As circumstantial evidence of this in practice, Trump responded in kind to Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif's [earlier call for a de-escalation](#) during his speech and therefore didn't decide to retaliate since no Americans were killed as a result of this choreographed stunt.

Assessing what just transpired, Iran certainly won the soft power war whereas the US undoubtedly claimed a military victory. The Islamic Republic presented itself as supposedly being strong enough to strike American bases at will with impunity (notwithstanding that they informed the Iraqis in advance who in turn told US troops to take caution in order to avoid casualties), while the Pentagon took out Iran's regional proxy war mastermind. In other words, the Iranian victory was purely superficial though that still doesn't take away from the long-term effect that it might have on the global audience's perceptions of the US' supposedly waning power, whereas the American victory really hit Iran where it hurt and literally led to "regime change" within the IRGC even if that angle is largely being overshadowed by Tehran's dramatic response. Both sides therefore "save face" in their own way by claiming their respective victories which are convincing enough for their domestic audiences while leaving the rest of the world to debate the zero-sum details of who really came out on top. Although a regional proxy war is expected to rage all throughout this year, the conventional peace prevailed, which was a direct result of Iran abandoning its "nuclear ambiguity" through the 2015 deal and thus having no means to deter an obliterating US counter-strike in the event that they were serious about bombing Americans.

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