

# What If They Started a War and No One Showed Up?

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*The humiliation of United States Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in Warsaw last week was a good thing. The ancient Greeks, exercising their demonstrated ability to synthesize defining characteristics, had a word for it: hubris. Hubris is when one develops an extreme and unreasonable feeling of confidence in a certain course of action that inevitably leads to one's downfall when that conceit proves to be based on false principles.*

Pompeo was in Warsaw for a “summit” arranged by the US State Department in partnership with the Polish government to discuss with representatives of sixty nations what to do about the fractious situation in the Middle East. In advance, he promised that the meeting would “deliver really good outcomes.” The gathering was initially conceived as a “war against Iran” precursor, intended to pull together a coalition against the Persians, but when it became clear that many of the potential participants would balk at such a designation, it assumed a broader agenda concerning “Peace and Security in the Middle East.”

Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine and Syria were not, not surprisingly, invited as some of them were the expected targets of whatever remedial action the conference might recommend. Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu was, of course, present, tweeting in advance of the gathering that it would be all about “war against Iran.” He also characteristically delivered a warning that Iran was planning a “second holocaust” for his country.

Many countries, including regional power Turkey, and global powers Russia and China refused to participate at all. The European Union, the French and the Germans all sent career diplomats to the meeting rather than their Foreign Ministers while Britain's Foreign Minister Jeremy Hunt only agreed to attend at the last minute after he was granted his wish to head a discussion session on Yemen.

The meeting was overshadowed by the context in which it took place, something that Pompeo was apparently too tone deaf to appreciate. The Europeans, to include close allies Britain, France and Germany have all been openly opposed to the White House's completely irrational decision last year to exit from the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which placed limits verified by intrusive inspections on Iran's nuclear program. America's closest allies made clear that they object to being told how and with whom they are permitted to do business, and they were finally doing something about it. Even US intelligence confirms that Iran has been fully compliant with the nuclear agreement, but the dunces in the White House are too blinded by hubris to change course.

The week before the conference opened the British, French and Germans also, perhaps deliberately, declared their intention to launch a “special purpose vehicle” barter system that would enable purchases of Iranian oil after the May 5th deadline which the United States had unilaterally declared for the initiation of sanctions prohibiting such activity.

Washington has declared that any countries disregarding its sanctions against Iran would be themselves subject to secondary sanctions implemented through the US Treasury's ability to both control and restrict access to the dollar denominated financial markets. Nevertheless, the action by the Europeans served as confirmation that much of the world wants to do business with Iran even if the White House says "no."

Present with the US delegation in Warsaw were Pompeo, Vice President Mike Pence, National Security Adviser John Bolton, Special Adviser Jared Kushner, and President Trump's personal attorney Rudy Giuliani. "America's Rabbi" Shmuley Boteach also appeared in an unofficial capacity. All of the Administration officials took the stage at one point or another to denounce Iran as the "world's greatest sponsor of terrorism," which appeared to resonate with Netanyahu but hardly anyone else. There was also considerable spontaneous theater provided by the American cast of characters in the lead-up to the conference itself.

In an interview with CBS News before the meetings, Pompeo indicated his pleasure over the impact of the existing sanctions on Iran. When asked if there had been any sign "...that this pressure is pushing Iran to negotiate with the US?" he responded that

"Things are much worse for the Iranian people, and we're convinced that will lead the Iranian people to rise up and change the behavior of the regime."

The suggestion that Washington believes in starving the very people it is claiming to want to help to bring about a violent uprising clearly did not disturb Pompeo in the least. And he exhibited no appreciation of the fact that pressuring Iran's government is actually the best way to strengthen it as the Iranian people [have been rallying](#) against the economic warfare being waged by the United States.

Not to be upstaged by Pompeo, John Bolton, in a video released on the Monday before the conference opened on Wednesday, celebrated in his own unique fashion the 40th anniversary of the Iranian revolution, which the people of Iran have recently been commemorating. Bolton called Iran "the central banker of international terrorism" and declared it guilty of "tyrannizing its own people and terrorizing the world." The video concluded with a direct threat to Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei:

"I don't think you'll have many more anniversaries to enjoy."

Also during the lead-up to the conference, Rudy Giuliani was featured at a pep rally in downtown Warsaw for the ["cult-like" terrorist group](#) Mujahedin-e-Khalq (MEK), an organization for which he has served as a paid lobbyist. He told a crowd of MEK supporters that "If we don't have a peaceful, democratic Iran then no matter what we do we'll have turmoil, difficulties, problems in the Middle East. Everyone agrees that Iran is the No. 1 state sponsor of terrorism in the world. That has to tell you something: Iran is a country you can't rely on, do business with, can't trust." He added that their government consists of "assassins, they are murderers and they should be out of power." Afterwards, Rudy would not disclose how much he had been paid to make the speech.

But it was Vice President Pence who took the prize for unmitigated gall in his address to the conferees in which he [accused](#) the Europeans of something close to treason: "They call this

scheme a ‘Special Purpose Vehicle.’ We call it an effort to break American sanctions against Iran’s murderous revolutionary regime.” He [insisted that](#)

“The time has come for our European partners to withdraw from the Iran nuclear deal and join with us as we bring the economic and diplomatic pressure necessary to give the Iranian people, the region and the world the peace, security and freedom they deserve.”

Pence might just as well have said “my way or the highway” or quoted George W. Bush’s line, “you’re either with us or against us.” The audience, including a large number of Washington-sycophants, responded with silence, [unimpressed](#) by Pence’s fulminations and his demands.

The Warsaw Summit did not produce the results envisioned by the White House, which were to pull together a group willing to escalate pressure on Iran before attacking it, while simultaneously generating support for Jared Kushner’s much discussed Israel/Palestine peace plan, due to be unveiled in April. The American plan will basically give Netanyahu everything he wants while relegating the Palestinians to the status of a non-people. As a result of the lukewarm reception in Warsaw, even from Arab states that truly hate Iran, Washington is now weaker in the Middle East than ever before. That is a good thing as the policies being embraced by Trump, Bolton, Pompeo, Giuliani and Kushner are not only an embarrassment, they are a potential disaster for everyone in the region as well as for the United States.

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**Michel Chossudovsky**

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