

WIN WITHOUT WAR



Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

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TOPLINE TAKEAWAYS

- *On Iran, Nikki Haley continues her disingenuous saber rattling.*
- *Syria needs more diplomacy, Donald Trump is offering more war.*

NIKKI HALEY THREATENS WAR WHILE CLAIMING SHE'S NOT THREATENING WAR

In a New York Times [op-ed](#) earlier this month, retired Army colonel Lawrence Wilkerson -- former Bush administration official and chief of staff to then-Secretary of State Colin Powell -- issued a dire warning that **the Trump administration is building a case for war with Iran** just like the Bush administration did in the run-up to the Iraq war.

As part of his supporting evidence, Wilkerson cited a recent presentation by U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Nikki Haley in which she accused Iran (with [flimsy evidence](#)) of supplying missiles to Houthi rebels in Yemen that were used against Saudi Arabia.

Wilkerson's case compelled Haley to respond in a Times [piece](#) of her own.

While **Haley didn't even bother to refute the meat of Wilkerson's case** -- namely Team Trump's efforts to link Iran to al-Qaeda and Trump's desire to kill the Iran nuclear deal -- her case implicating Iran in Houthi attacks in Saudi Arabia isn't as clear cut as she claims. Consider:

- Haley claims: "Last week, the United Nations published a report with news a lot of people don't want to hear. A panel of experts found that Iran is violating a United Nations weapons embargo — specifically, that missiles fired by Yemen's Houthi rebels into Saudi Arabia last year were made in Iran."
- Reality: In her haste to create a narrative that supports her case, Haley ignored some caveats in [the UN Panel of Experts report](#) that are worth noting:

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- First, the experts couched their conclusion on the source of missile components and technology, stating: “As of yet, the Panel has no evidence as to the identity of the supplier, or any intermediary third party.”
- Second, Iran’s non-compliance to UNSCR 2216 also hinges on the fact it did not “take the necessary measures to prevent the direct or indirect supply, sale or transfer of such technology to the Houthi-Saleh forces.” If that is the metric for violating UNSCR 2216, then the United States may also be in non-compliance given the United States [failure](#) to [prevent](#) the transfer of American weapons and military technology sold to former president Saleh (subject U.S. end-use monitoring laws) to the rebels in the war.
- In a country stuck in continual civil war for nearly two decades -- which has been internationalized by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Iran -- and awash in an estimated 40 to 60 million weapons, such arms proliferation is not surprising. The more Nikki Haley seeks to isolate Iran, and by affiliation the Houthis, she's actually driving them closer together. By accepting the Saudi strategy of crushing the Houthis and preventing any power sharing deal to emerge, **the U.S. is supporting an unwinnable quagmire that is inviting Iranian meddling, and starving millions of people for no clear strategic purpose**, except to saber-rattle Iran.

And finally, in an irony of all ironies, **Haley’s op-ed actually concluded by threatening war with Iran**: While she said her presentation wasn’t meant to “lay the groundwork for war,” one paragraph later she later wrote: “[I]f action is not taken, then someday soon, when innocent Saudi civilians are killed by Iranian weapons, the chance for peace will be lost.”

[SYRIA NEEDS DIPLOMACY, TRUMP IS OFFERING GUNS](#)

Bashar al-Assad’s forces have been targeting a rebel held enclave on the outskirts of Damascus throughout the week, killing hundreds and wounding thousands, many of which are civilians. UN officials have called the offensive -- which also targeted hospitals and other civilian infrastructure -- a “[massacre](#)” that has created a “[hell on earth](#).” (UNICEF [said](#) it no longer has words for the atrocities in Syria.)

While UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has called for an immediate cease fire, the Trump administration continues to do ... nothing constructive: The U.S. is throwing little diplomatic weight at this issue and is instead largely relying on the military (~2,000 U.S. troops are inside Syria [without any legal authorization](#)) to push back against Assad and Iranian influence.

MESSAGING:

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- The solution the crisis in Syria is political. **Trump is relying primarily on military tools while remaining on the diplomatic sidelines.**
- Trump is putting our troops in harm's way without achievable objectives, an exit strategy, or congressional authorization – and **threatening to draw them into a cycle of escalation** and further complicating the Syrian civil war.
- **Trump is gutting the State Department**, USAID, and other tools of nonmilitary statecraft thereby making a diplomatic resolution to the conflict in Syria more difficult.
- There is no military solution to the Syrian civil war.
 - Countering Iranian influence, preventing a resurgence of extremist groups like ISIS and Al Qaeda, and ensuring a democratic transition and accountability in Syria in the long-term each **require a sustained and multilateral diplomatic intervention by the United States**, not U.S. troops on the ground.
- We cannot fix Syria by getting deeper involved militarily.
 - Thousands of American troops and near continuous airstrikes against ISIS **have done nothing to alleviate the atrocities committed in Syria**. The presence of U.S. troops in Syria has not and will not provide the accountability needed for crimes committed, address the military status quo, or prevent the Assad regime of committing more atrocities against civilians.
- There is no current congressional authorization for new missions in Syria to combat Iranian influence or prevent the Syrian government from retaking territory previously held by ISIS.
- Using the presence of U.S. troops and control of Syria's oil fields in eastern Syria as leverage in the U.N.-led peace process **violates international law**.
- The U.S. has a responsibility to help end the human suffering in Syria, caused in part by a continued U.S. air war that has caused significant civilian casualties and a flooding of U.S. supplied weapons into the war. Instead of honoring this responsibility, the Trump Administration continues to pour fuel on the fires of war while slamming America's doors shut to those seeking refuge from the inferno.

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BURIED LEDES

Congress and Trump [just gave](#) the Pentagon a raise **big enough to match the GDP of any one of more than 100 countries.**

On that note, [defense industry titan](#) Lockheed Martin gets more money from U.S. taxpayers **than the State Department does** -- and [don't think](#) the Democrats are going to do anything about it.

Trump [thinks](#) he can **start a war with North Korea without Congressional authorization.**

And [watch](#) how nonchalantly GOP Senator Jim Risch reveals that **Trump is ready to start a war with North Korea**, one he adds “will be of biblical proportions.”

Meanwhile, the Center for International Policy's Charles Knight [notes](#) that **Trump's “no concessions” policy on North Korea isn't going to work.**

The State Department's global human rights [report will](#) **water down portions that highlight women's reproductive rights and discrimination issues.**

A retired U.S. Navy admiral and former military commander of NATO [says](#) **Trump's plan to build “low yield” nukes is a bad idea.**

The New York Times has an [interactive feature](#) on **why 4 U.S. soldiers died in a remote African desert.**

And finally, **John Kerry dismantled Bibi Netanyahu's recent chirping** [about](#) the Iran deal ([so did our friends at NIAC](#)).