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Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

TOPLINE TAKEAWAY

- *We're dangerously close to going to war with Iran.*

WILL TRUMP'S OCTOBER SURPRISE BE A WAR ON IRAN?

As the controversy swirling around Brett Kavanaugh's Supreme Court nomination continues to occupy national attention -- rightfully so -- the dangerous escalation of Trump's Iran policy has slipped through the cracks.

But we can't ignore this story, because Trump and his cabinet of war hawks are busy laying the groundwork to justify another devastating conflict in the Middle East. As we approach the anniversaries of the start of America's war in Afghanistan and the vote to authorize our invasion of Iraq -- two wars that continue to this day -- we should be reminded that the costs of war with Iran would likely be far greater than we can even imagine.

ENMITY OVER AMITY

Whether waged as a deliberate war of distraction to absorb public attention during election season, or an accidental war sparked by the Trump Administration's dangerous rhetoric or a regional misstep, a devastating war with Iran appears more plausible with each passing day. As the past few weeks have demonstrated, the Trump Administration has been laying the foundation, brick by brick, for justifying that war.

From appointing the [obsessive](#) pro-war with Iran hawk John Bolton as his National Security Advisor to announcing the reimposition of the harshest level of sanctions on Iran, Trump has made it clear that he does not seek diplomacy. This reality was made especially stark last week at the United Nations, where Trump and his top aides engaged in a united and concerted effort to demonize Iran, a performance marked by unabashed calls for [regime change](#), a cinematic "[Outlaw Regime](#)" campaign targeting Iran, and bellicose threats of "[hell to pay](#)."

This week, the administration laid more bricks on this troubling foundation. On Wednesday, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo [announced](#) that the U.S. would be withdrawing from a 1955 Treaty of Amity with Iran.

Despite its largely symbolic nature, the treaty served as a basis for diplomatic efforts and a reminder that amity between both nations should be the ultimate goal. By withdrawing from the

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treaty, Trump rejects even the notion of a one-day normalized relationship with Iran and continues to eschew diplomacy for harsher methods that result in nothing but the suffering of the Iranian people.

Just last week at the UN, Trump [called](#) on all nations to “support Iran’s people as they struggle to reclaim their religious and righteous destiny.” His withdrawal from the treaty highlights the emptiness of those words, as Pompeo justified the decision by pointing to the World Court’s unanimous (but ultimately unenforceable) ruling that the U.S. must lift any sanctions that [threaten](#) the flow of food, medicine, and other humanitarian products that “may have a serious detrimental impact on the health and lives of individuals.” Pompeo argued that the World Court’s requirement to safeguard the Iranian people’s access to humanitarian goods threatens U.S. sovereignty. Apparently, the Trump Administration’s vision of “supporting” the Iranian people includes denying them basic humanitarian products.

Pompeo also [announced](#) the closure of the U.S. consulate in Basra, Iraq after recent rocket attacks that he blamed on Iran, saying, “We can see the hand of the ayatollah and his henchmen.” It’s worth noting two things here: 1) Iraq’s Foreign Minister [said](#) he had no knowledge of any information corroborating Pompeo’s statement and 2) the Iranian consulate in Iraq was also [attacked](#) at the same time. Given this, Pompeo’s suspect allegation and the State Department’s removal of diplomats in Iraq marks a significant escalation in the administration’s rhetorical war against Iran, clearly positioning Iran as a direct lethal threat to the United States.

THE SAME PLAYBOOK, SIXTEEN YEARS LATER

A dangerous, rogue regime that abuses its people. The threat of deadly weapons uniting with the spectre of terrorism. A country whose actions destabilize the Middle East.

Does the story [sound familiar](#)? It should. Because we’ve seen this all before.

The Iraq War playbook laid the groundwork for the U.S. invasion, a series of unrelated accusations cobbled together to argue that war was the only sensible solution left. By the time Bush asked Congress for authorization for the Iraq War in October of 2002, opposing the war appeared politically dangerous and unviable. As we know from the state of Iraq and the greater Middle East today, Bush’s 2002 October Surprise had devastating consequences. We also know that opposing the Iraq War was [actually better](#) in the long run for members of Congress. But back in 2002, the argument was convincing enough to justify a war.

October 7th marks the seventeenth anniversary of America’s war with Afghanistan. And on October 11, 2002, the Congress officially granted George W. Bush authority to wage war in Iraq. The anniversaries of these conflicts serve as sobering reminders of the danger of shunning diplomatic solutions. But they also serve as urgent reminders that we must muster enough

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momentum to stop a potential war with Iran before a public decision is made to start a war, even as Trump and his cabinet of war hawks move us closer and closer to the brink.

WHAT WE CAN DO

Thankfully, momentum to counter Trump and his war cabinet is already building. Senator Tom Udall, also [cognizant](#) of the repetition of the same dangerous playbook that launched the Iraq War, introduced legislation that would prevent any Congressionally unauthorized war with Iran. Senator Udall's bill creates a significant roadblock to the administration's unilateral march to war. [Sign our petition](#) and demand that the Senate pass this vital legislation (our partners at Women's Action for New Directions are also circulating a [petition](#)).

BURIED LEDES

Continuing a [trend](#), two [new surveys](#) out this week show that Americans broadly reject Trump's "America First" unilateral approach to foreign affairs and that **America's image abroad has plummeted under Trump.**

Blackwater founder Erik Prince is still trying to make mercenaries happen in Afghanistan. The country's National Security Council spokesperson [said](#), rightly, that Prince has a "colonialist type of arrogance" and called him "a war profiteer who stands to make \$10 billion a year from such a plan."

Prominent Saudi journalist, Washington Post contributor, and a vocal critic of the monarchy's rising repression, [Jamal Khashoggi](#), **has gone missing after visiting the Saudi Consulate in Turkey.** "I can speak when so many cannot," he once [wrote](#).

Here's how Saudi Arabia influences U.S. foreign policy: Pay American lobbyists loads of cash. Those lobbyists then meet with Congressional staff or members, and on the same day, [make max or near max contributions](#) to that member of Congress.

Canada [stripped](#) Aung San Suu Kyi of her honorary Canadian citizenship **for her silence and inaction on the genocide of the Rohingya in Burma.**

"A Congolese gynecological surgeon and a Yazidi woman who was a captive of the Islamic State were [awarded the Nobel Peace Prize on Friday](#) **for their campaigns to end the use of mass rape as a weapon of war.**"

Trump's State Department **eliminated reproductive rights issues from its annual human rights reports.** House Democrats and civil society groups are [pushing back](#).

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The Economist Intelligence Unit released a [report](#) this week concluding that **war on the Korean Peninsula would depress the U.S. economic performance** to levels comparable to 2010 post-Great Recession levels, with the agricultural and automotive sectors hit especially hard.

Representatives Peter DeFazio (D-OR), Walter Jones (R-NC), Barbara Lee (D-CA) and 48 others [sent a letter](#) to Sec. Pompeo to **demand more information on the State Department's legally-required certification** that misleadingly states that the Saudi-led coalition is taking steps to minimize civilian casualties in its war in Yemen.

And finally, some good news for a change: A federal judge [this week](#) **blocked the Trump administration from terminating the Temporary Protected Status** of about 300,000 immigrants from Haiti, Sudan, Nicaragua and El Salvador, citing the designation lacked explanation or justification and may have been based on racial bias.