

# WIN WITHOUT WAR



## Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

*Intel for Advocacy*

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SL: What happens when you hire an arsonist as fire chief

### [JOHN 'BOMB 'EM' BOLTON IS DRIVING U.S. IRAN POLICY TOWARD WAR](#)

**Alarm bells should be going off:** We're closer to war with Iran than we've perhaps ever been.

Throughout the past two and a half years, [we have carefully documented](#) how the Trump administration has been [patiently and methodically](#) driving us to this point. But events of this past week have turned that policy into overdrive. Here's a quick look back at what has us so concerned:

#### THE CALL TO ARMS

On Sunday, National Security Advisor/[arsonist](#) John Bolton -- not Donald Trump -- issued a [statement](#) saying that the U.S. is sending an aircraft carrier group and bomber task force to the Middle East region in response to unspecified threats from Iran.

- **In the statement, Bolton laid out extremely broad criteria for U.S. military action:** an attack by Iran -- or any of its proxy or allied forces in the region -- on U.S. forces, interests, or those of our allies "will be met with unrelenting force." As an indication of how broad these parameters are, FDD's [Mark Dubowitz](#), who's been gunning for regime change in Iran for more than a decade, interpreted this to even include an attack by Hamas on Israel, because, he [said](#), the administration worries the Gaza events are aimed at distracting the Israelis from whatever Iran may be planning.
- **The U.S. Navy actually announced the carrier group deployment a month ago,** leading many to conclude that Bolton used it to intensify pressure on Iran.

#### MANIPULATING THE INTELLIGENCE

The statement from Bolton -- who has a [history](#) of manipulating intelligence for his own policy preferences -- cited "a number of troubling and escalatory indications and warnings" from Iran as justification for the carrier and bomber deployment, but offered no specifics. Content from the

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intelligence began trickling out in subsequent news reports, **but those were quickly dismissed as overblown.**

- Axios [reported](#) on Monday that the U.S. got the intelligence from the Israelis, but also that **one Israeli official said "it is still unclear" what the Iranians are up to.** Other [reports](#) were loaded with similar caveats: unnamed U.S. officials citing "potential preparations," intel that "may indicate possible attacks," and that the U.S. "was not expecting any imminent Iranian attack." So in other words, nothing concrete, specific, or severe.
- Unnamed U.S. officials then fed a [story](#) to CNN about how "Intelligence showing that **Iran is likely moving short-range ballistic missiles aboard boats** in the Persian Gulf was one of the critical reasons the U.S. decided to move an aircraft carrier strike group and B-52 bombers into the region."
- But a subsequent NBC [story](#) downplayed the missiles in boats intel, noting that **U.S. officials have actually "accused Iran of moving missiles and missile components through the region's waterways for years."** But NBC also reported, again based on anonymous U.S. officials, that the reason for the increased U.S. military posture in the region was "a call [by Iran's leaders] to awaken and activate" Iranian proxies in Iraq. **What does that mean?** Who knows, but the story later quoted a Democratic congressional official who saw the same intelligence saying **the Trump administration's response to it "seems wildly out of proportion."**
- In congruence with that theme, the Daily Beast also [reported](#) this week that "multiple sources close to the situation" said Bolton and Team Trump **blew the intelligence on Iran "out of proportion, characterizing the threat as more significant than it actually was."**
- **And just like Dick Cheney used to do** before the Iraq war to manipulate intelligence, Bolton reportedly went to the CIA this week to have an "[unusual](#)" meeting with senior officials about intel on Iran.

## THE CONSEQUENCES

Iran's patience is (understandably) wearing thin. Just days after Bolton's statement, Iran's President Hassan Rouhani put another huge dent in the future of the nuclear deal, [announcing](#) that Iran would cease abiding by certain limits on uranium enrichment set out by the agreement, unless certain economic benefits were restored within 60 days (an unlikely proposition).

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And beyond the potential collapse of the JCPOA, the Trump administration's aggressive moves toward Iran this week greatly increase the risk and prospect for some kind of military confrontation with Iran or its allied forces in region – whether intentional or accidental. Thousands of U.S. troops are on the ground in the Middle East, at times operating in close proximity to Iranian-backed militias and proxies, while Israel often conducts military operations inside Syria, where both Iranian and U.S. forces are located.

And what does Bolton's ultimatum mean for the Saudi-United Arab Emirates war against Houthi rebels in Yemen, a group the Trump administration claims is more closely tied to Iran than it actually is? To complicate the situation further, the Trump administration's diplomatic channels to Iran's leaders are not what they were during the Obama years, meaning there are fewer opportunities to defuse a potentially volatile situation should one unexpectedly arise (recall back in July 2016 when the Iranian navy [captured 10 American sailors](#) who strayed into Iranian waters in the Persian Gulf. Then-Secretary of State John Kerry's close relationship with Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif was a significant factor in preventing the situation from escalating, and leading to the Americans' quick release).

Former Obama administration national security official Colin Kahl [put it bluntly](#):

Consequently, as the first anniversary of Trump's withdrawal from the Iran nuclear accord approaches, the action-reaction spiral the administration set in motion with its maximum pressure campaign has produced a very ominous situation—**one in which the risk of military confrontation grows by the day.** ...

Compounding matters, if Iran resumes its nuclear activities, we can expect a return to the type of [Israeli threats](#) of military action that were common from 2009 to 2012. Only this time, the U.S. administration is much more likely to encourage Israeli strikes rather than seek to constrain them.

For now it appears that the Trump administration [may be reining in its rhetoric](#) and stepping back from the precipice. However, as long as John Bolton has the keys to our national security apparatus, war with Iran will always be a more likely scenario than not.

## MESSAGING

Bolton and Trump's efforts to kill the Iran nuclear deal, escalatory rhetoric, and military moves toward Iran **do nothing but put us on a path to war.**

- The Trump administration has sought confrontation with Iran from day one, and Trump hiring Bolton, who has been calling for war with Iran for nearly two decades, only

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increases the risk of war.

- Team Trump is using the George W. Bush administration's Iraq war playbook, including manipulating intelligence, to put us on the path to war with Iran.

**The nuclear agreement has been successful in placing strict limits on Iran's ability to build a nuclear weapon** and thus avoiding war. The United States must now return to compliance.

- All members of Congress and presidential candidates must pledge to return to the nuclear deal and open up political and diplomatic space to address concerns about Iran's activities in the region and human rights abuses at home.
- If Iran decides to end compliance with the nuclear deal and restart elements of its program that were frozen or rolled back under the deal, the Trump administration is solely responsible.

By working to kill the Iran deal, **Trump has tarnished the efficacy and credibility of American diplomacy**, alienated our closest allies in Europe, and aligned the U.S. with authoritarian regimes who prefer war over diplomacy.

**Trump's reimposition of suffocating sanctions is making life impossible for the Iranian people**, particularly in the wake of devastating floods that have displaced tens of thousands inside Iran.

**Members of Congress can help push back on Trump's march to war** with Iran by speaking out and supporting House and Senate companion bills, led in the Senate by [Sens. Tom Udall, Dick Durbin, and Rand Paul](#), and in the House by [Rep. Anna Eshoo](#), to cut off funds for an unauthorized attack on Iran.

## **BURIED LEDES**

This is the [inside story](#) about how one Democratic House member with deep ties to the Saudi and right-wing Israel lobbies **tried to blow up a vote on withdrawing the U.S. military from the Saudi-UAE intervention against Houthis in Yemen**.

In [reality](#), **the Trump administration's national security budget request hovers around \$1.25 trillion**, "[s]o the next time a president, a general, a secretary of defense, or a hawkish member of Congress insists that the U.S. military is woefully underfunded, think twice."

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The United Nations has [concluded](#) that human beings “are transforming Earth’s natural landscapes so dramatically that as many as one million plant and animal species are now at risk of extinction, **posing a dire threat to ecosystems that people all over the world depend on for their survival.**”

More than a dozen House Democrats [sent a letter](#) to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu **asking him to stop the deportation of Omar Shakir**, a U.S. citizen and director of the Human Rights Watch office for Israel and the Palestinian territories.

This is an incredible [story](#) about how **Facebook is needlessly abetting Donald Trump’s reckless foreign policy.**

**Trump’s immigration policy chief fascist Stephen Miller is getting ready to implement a new travel ban, [this time](#)** from those coming from what Trump has called “shithole countries.”

[This is the cartoon](#) the international edition of the New York Times **should have published.**

A Virginia mother told [her story](#) about **how her son was lured into the alt-right, and how he came to realize it was a bunch of nonsense.**

[The art of no deal](#): our advocacy director, Erica Fein, weighs in on how Trump’s negotiating tactics **are failing him around the world** and making us all less safe.

And finally, you might think this story came from the Onion, but ... [it’s real](#). The U.S. military now has a missile that **“doesn’t explode, but brandishes knives to shred the target.”**