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Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

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SL: Trump's Iran policy is tanking

[TRUMP, NOT THE OIL TANKER ATTACK, IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CURRENT CRISIS WITH IRAN](#)

During a short [press conference](#) on Thursday in which he took no questions, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo -- without offering any evidence -- blamed Iran for attacks on two oil tankers, one of which was a Japanese vessel, in the Gulf of Oman earlier that day, as Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was in Tehran working to de-escalate tensions.

U.S. Central Command then released a [video](#) allegedly showing a small boat they claimed belongs to Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps removing an unexploded mine from the damaged Japanese vessel (purportedly to hide evidence of Iranian culpability).

Experts have [noted](#) that "the boat's clear and distinct connection to Iran or the IRGC, however, is not evident in the video itself" and the owner of the Japanese tanker has [disputed](#) U.S. claims that it had been damaged by a bomb, but rather by a flying object.

It's entirely possible (and likely) that Iran had something to do with the attacks. It could also have been a (rare) false flag attempt by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (or even in a more unlikely scenario, the U.S. or Israel) in an effort to drag the U.S. into an all-out war with Iran.

But regardless of culpability, **tensions are escalating quickly and could spiral out of control.** The Trump administration is using the attacks as justification to amp up its bellicose rhetoric toward Iran and build a case for increased confrontation, as Pompeo did during his press conference, saying "they should be understood in the context of 40 years of unprovoked aggression against freedom-loving nations." Trump himself has [put the prospect of talks on hold](#) because of the incident.

MESSAGING

Donald Trump's "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran is failing and bringing us closer to war.

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- If it is proven that Iran is responsible for the attacks, [we shouldn't be surprised that Iran is lashing out](#). As a reward for complying with an agreement to rein in its nuclear program, Team Trump has engaged in economic warfare, imposing crushing sanctions that are destroying Iran's economy and devastating the Iranian people.

Donald Trump, John Bolton, and Mike Pompeo are responsible for the current crisis with Iran.

- Regardless of who is responsible for the tanker attacks, the ensuing crisis and potential to escalation toward a larger military conflict is because Trump pulled out of the Iran nuclear deal and increased tensions with a bolstered U.S. military presence in the region aimed at confronting Iran.
- If these attacks do not spark an all out war (as it is [not without precedent](#)), Team Trump will use the incident to further build its case for war. Two members of Congress recently revealed that during a private presentation, Pompeo argued that the 2001 Authorization for the Use of Military Force to go after the perpetrators of 9/11 could apply to Iran.

Polls show The American people don't support Trump's Iran policy and they don't want to go to war. [\[Source\]](#) [\[Source\]](#)

CONGRESS STARTING TO TAKE ACTION

Meanwhile this week, the House Armed Services Committee debated an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act that would deny any funding for an unauthorized war with Iran. While the amendment — sponsored by Reps. Ro Khanna, Seth Moulton, Anthony Brown and others — was put on hold, HASC Chair Rep. Adam Smith promised to bring up the measure on the House floor with revised language. NIAC has more [here](#) on the HASC debate on the Iran amendment.

The debate on the amendment also revealed some troubling facts: as noted above, behind closed doors, the Trump administration is making the case that the 2001 AUMF applies to Iran. After Rep. Mike Turner disputed the necessity of the Khanna-Moulton-Brown amendment, Rep. Matt Gaetz [countered](#), noting that during a recent private presentation to members of Congress, Trump officials argued that “there are elements of the 2001 AUMF that would authorize their hostilities toward Iran.”

Later during the debate Rep. Elissa Slotkin [confirmed](#) Gaetz's reading of the events. “We were absolutely presented with a full formal presentation on how the 2001 AUMF might authorize war on Iran. ... Secretary Pompeo said it in his own words.”

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Rep. Mac Thornberry said during the HASC debate that the 2001 AUMF does not give authorization for war with Iran, “[full stop](#).” And the next day, some of [the 2020 Democratic presidential candidates](#) and other lawmakers piled on.

“The 2001 AUMF does not authorize war with Iran. Period. Full stop.” Sen. Tim Kaine [tweeted](#) in response. “I’ll keep doing everything I can to stop Trump from starting an unnecessary war in the Middle East.”

“The answer is no: the 2001 AUMF does not authorize war with Iran,” [said](#) Sen. Tom Udall, who is working on a [similar measure](#) to block war with Iran in the Senate. “After the 9/11 attacks, Congress authorized action against Al Qaeda & the Taliban. No one thought they were authorizing war with a completely different country, 18 years later.”

We have more [here](#) on Trump’s attempts to (falsely) link Iran to al-Qaeda and the Trump administration’s flirtation with using the 2001 AUMF to justify war with Iran.

BURIED LEDES

GOP-led amendments to the NDAA that **preserve funding for the so-called “low-yield” nuclear weapon** [failed this week](#). The bill [also contains measures](#) to close the prison at Guantanamo Bay and prohibit the Pentagon from redirecting funds to build a border wall.

CORRUPTION ALERT: Just [one day prior](#) to the NDAA mark-up, **Rep. Vicky Hartzler hosted a \$500-a-head fundraiser with defense industry executives**.

The United States military “[is the world’s single largest consumer of oil and a top contributor to climate change](#).”

A Saudi teenager held without charge for more than 4 years is **facing possible execution for participating in anti-government protests** [when he was 10 years old](#). Meanwhile, Iran’s foreign minister this week [defended](#) his country’s policy of executing gay people.

Calling out gross human rights abuses around the world is (rightly) a staple of bipartisan foreign policy rhetoric. But [perhaps we should be looking inward too](#).

Maybe we shouldn’t have a new Cold War with China and instead work with them [to combat climate change?](#)

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And finally, **BABY TRUMP BLIMP IS COMING**. Code Pink has [filed an application](#) for a permit to fly the whiner-in-chief balloon to protest his hijacking of Washington DC's annual Fourth of July festivities.