

MAGA Foreign Policy and the Iranian Regime

By Victor Davis Hanson

One topic that's come up throughout January and this week again is what to do about the Iranian [nuclear proliferation](#) problem or crisis.



And we all know that they're on the verge of getting a bomb. And it was recently announced they could—they have enough fissionable material, if they were to accelerate their processing of

fissionable material, they could probably get a bomb within a month.

So, what do we do about it? Everybody—it reminds me so much of Aesop's fable about bellringing the cat. Remember that fable of our youth when the mice got together and they say, "The cat is picking us off one by one. We need to put a bell around his neck so we could be warned." And everybody said, "That's a great idea." The next item of business among the mice assembly was, who will bell the cat?

What I'm getting at is [the Europeans](#), I think even the Chinese and Russians, don't want on their border a nuclear Iran. The Americans, the Israelis, everybody knows they should not—that theocratic regime should not get the bomb. But who bells the cat? And that's the question.

President Donald Trump comes in, he deposed of the chief terrorist five years ago, Qassem Soleimani. He's not afraid to do it. But on the one hand, there's the MAGA agenda of

“America first” and keep out of the Middle East and at least out of optional military engagements. And then you have to juxtapose that against the deterrent policy of Donald Trump, who took out Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, and it’s no better friend, no worse enemy. And maybe to restore deterrence he needs to send a lesson.

Then there’s the other binary, that Iran, right now, is in economic chaos. It doesn’t have enough power. That seems impossible. I think it’s the fifth-largest producer of oil and natural gas in the world. But it does not have enough fossil fuels to run its generation plants. And people are experiencing massive blackouts.

And this comes at a time that all of its terrorist surrogates—the Houthis, Hamas, Hezbollah, the Syrians—have either been completely destroyed, or they’re under enormous pressure, or they’ve been attrited to such a degree they’re not operative, for the moment.

So, then the question is, if you bomb Iran, when the people are getting very angry at the regime and its terrorist appendages are weakened anyway, maybe it would be unnecessary because the Iranian people, like they did in 2009, might rise up. But unlike Barack Obama, who ignored that Green Revolution, Donald Trump and the Israelis would encourage it.

And so, maybe the correct stance of the incoming Trump administration is to go back to the maximum-pressure campaign of Mike Pompeo and Donald Trump and have strict sanctions on oil exports, maybe even a blockade, put the pressure on so the people then throw the theocracy out itself.

But on the other hand, people are going to argue, “Wait a minute, there are no Iranian air defenses. For one of the few times in history, that regime is naked. There is no Assad. There is no Hezbollah. There is no Hamas. There is no Houthis that are capable of, as surrogates, attacking the Israeli

state. So, maybe you could attack Iran—just this brief window—because Israel, in a series of brilliant air responses, has destroyed its ability—Tehran’s ability to defend itself. So, the regime is naked. And either the United States or Israel could take that out.”

So, that’s another argument.

In the case of Israel, the question is, will you ever have this opportunity again to retaliate to the 500 drones, ballistic missiles, and cruise missiles that were launched, that attacked the Jewish homeland? And is that window also—that window of memory—is that also evaporating? So, people were forgetting what [Iran](#) did, that it sent that many projectiles [against Israel](#).

So, would Israel be able then, A) to get through the defenses? Have a week of bombing that would be necessary to eliminate the threat and have the Trump administration approve it.

And then finally, we get to the other known unknown. What is the actual status of the bomb? Logic dictates that Iran wouldn’t lie and say, “We don’t yet have the bomb,” when they did because it would have no deterrent effect. Most people say, “We do have it,” when they don’t have it, a la Saddam Hussein, things like that. But Israel can’t be sure. And you have to be 99.99% sure or you’re talking about an existential fate.

Bottom line, add up all of these known unknowns, and I think that the wisest course is for the Trump administration to say to Israel, “We will keep China out, we will keep Russia out. It’s your decision. But unlike the Biden administration, we put no limitations on your response and we will give you the necessary wherewithal as far as munitions and intelligence to carry that mission out, if you so choose. We are working on a parallel path of embargoes, maximum pressure on Iran, but we can’t guarantee that it will be successful in time. You make the decision. And whatever decision you make, we, the United

States, we'll support it."

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