

Putting Iran on Notice

When uncertainty is our friend.

by Kenneth Timmerman



The announcement from National Security Advisor Lieutenant General Michael Flynn on Wednesday that the Trump administration was “putting Iran on notice” after its latest ballistic missile test is bad news for the ruling clerical elite and its Revolutionary Guards, and potentially good news for Iranians who love freedom.

Pundits in the United States and Europe bemoaned a lack of specificity, although one [snarky establishment commentator](#) noted, it sounded like Flynn was saying, “do that again, and we’ll pop you.”

The Iranians responded with predictable chest-thumping. “Iran is the strongest power in the region and has a lot of political, economic and military power,” [said former foreign minister Ali Akbar Velayati](#), now a top advisor to absolute

ruler Ayatollah Khamenei.

He and other Iranian leaders warned that Iran would act in “self-defense” if the United States struck first, a scarcely-veiled threat to attack U.S. assets, U.S. friends and allies in the region, and possibly to carry out terrorist attacks on U.S. soil.

So what exactly did Flynn mean?

First, the obvious: there is a new Sheriff in town. Donald Trump is not Barack Obama. Nor is he George W. Bush, or Bill Clinton, or any of his predecessors who for the past 38-years have pretty much given the Islamic regime in Tehran a pass whenever it has attacked Americans.

What will the new Sheriff do? It’s easy to imagine Tehran’s leaders with their turbans in a twist, trying to read between General Flynn’s lines.

Did he mean the United States will blow Iranian patrol boats out of the water the next time they try to “swarm” a U.S. navy vessel in the Persian Gulf? The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) has been practicing such tactics for years, breaking off just hundreds of meters short of collision.

Those swarming attacks are a serious threat, since our naval gunners cannot know which of a dozen small boats may be intending to break off from the swarm in a suicide attack against our ship.

Or did he mean that the U.S. will respond if Iran test-fires another long-range ballistic missile? How so? Militarily? With new sanctions? Or with some form of technical sabotage such as Stuxnet?

That’s just it: they can’t know.

Perhaps General Flynn was referring to the “emergency” United Nations Security Council [meeting on Tuesday](#), convened by the

United States? But that's where both Russia and France [came to Iran's aid](#), praising the nuclear deal and calling on the United States to maintain it.

Perhaps General Flynn was responding to the *failure* of the United Nations to respond, meaning that the U.S. is planning unilateral measures?

Oh, my: in Tehran, they just can't know.

Strategic uncertainty, as long as it is followed up at some point with concrete action, is a huge advance in our policy toward the Islamo-fascist regime in Tehran. Keeping the Iranians guessing exactly what we will do, and how hard, potentially could even deter them from taking some aggressive actions.

A new, more muscular policy toward the Islamic state in Iran will have many moving parts. But first and foremost, it will identify the regime as an enemy of the United States of America. Because that is how they have behaved since their inception thirty-eight years ago next week.

America has never used the powerful tools at our disposal to punish – or heaven forbid, actually undermine – the Iranian regime. Here are just a few of the options that should be on the table:

- The U.S. could intensify Persian-language broadcasting from the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, providing Iranians deprived of a free press with accurate information about the United States and about their own country. This will require major reforms at both services spearheaded by a dynamic new CEO at the Broadcasting Board of Governors.
- The U.S. could use the levers of power diplomacy to shun Iran at international organizations such as the United Nations Human Rights Council and UNESCO, and to prevent Iranian

diplomats from international travel.

- The U.S. could use our permanent delegation to the IAEA in Vienna, Austria, to intensify intelligence sharing with UN inspectors to ensure they conduct rigorous inspections of Iran's nuclear installations.
- The U.S. could take steps to curtail Iranian expansionism into Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Lebanon.
- The U.S. could actually punish the Iranian regime for its acts of international terrorism, including the 1983 Beirut bombings of our embassy and the U.S. Marine barracks, the 1996 attack on the Khobar Towers, the 1998 attacks on U.S. embassies in Africa, the 2000 attack on the U.S.S. Cole, the September 11, 2001 attacks, the ongoing supply of Explosively Formed Projectiles (EFPs) to militias in Iraq that have taken the lives of an estimated 1,500 U.S. servicemen, the bounty offered by the IRGC to Taliban terrorists for every American they kill, and the September 11, 2012 attacks in Benghazi.

Many of these attacks were carried out in conjunction with al Qaeda or al Qaeda affiliates, a relationship long pooh-poohed by the U.S. intelligence community but which in recent years has been [well-documented](#).

Punishment could include [identifying as war criminals](#) the Iranian regime officials responsible for these acts, indicting them, and issuing Interpol Red Notices on them to prevent them from international travel. It could also include Treasury and intelligence community efforts to identify, block, and seize their overseas assets.

Finally, and most important of all, the U.S. could provide support for opponents of the Iranian regime to include open support for human rights and freedom advocates similar to what President Reagan did for Soviet refusniks, and covert support for [active opposition groups](#) inside Iran.

What will President Trump choose from this menu – and from the many other policy proposals that undoubtedly are being floated by his advisors?

Oh, my: in Tehran, they don't know.

If it were my decision, I would say: let's keep them guessing until the policies are ready for prime time. Then let's roll them out and watch the Islamic State of Iran's leaders squirm.

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