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## Instigators of a Persian Gulf Crisis



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Recent weeks have seen tensions between the United States and Iran soar, initially after a May 2019 incident in which four commercial vessels were struck in the Gulf of Oman (two Saudi oil tankers, one Norwegian and an Emirati ship), ebb thereafter and escalate yet again when a similar attack took place a month later on the Japanese Kokuka Courageous and Norwegian Front Altair tankers, also in the Gulf of Oman. Tellingly, when it appeared the war rhetoric had subsided after the first incident it quickly ratcheted up, and by several degrees, after the second, as if the May episode had failed to achieve its goal. President Trump's apparent last-minute change of heart in calling off planned

airstrikes when Iran downed a U.S. military surveillance drone last Thursday highlights the war footing Washington is on.

Both tanker assaults were allegedly at the hands of Iran, that is, according to Saudi King Salman, Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and National Security Advisor John Bolton, albeit by unclear means and for dubious reasons.

It did not take long for doubts to surface as to why Iran would attack a Japanese tanker in the midst of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's visit to Tehran in an attempt to mediate between it and Washington. The suspect authenticity of a grainy video released by U.S. Central Command purportedly showing an Iranian patrol boat removing an unexploded limpet mine from the tanker also raised skepticism (the crew indicated they were hit by a flying object, not a mine).

Putting sloppy, poorly designed "evidence" aside, recent history makes clear who the vested parties keen to stoke a manufactured hostility between Iran and its neighbors are. Indeed, one such actor has for decades used a comparable strategy of deliberate provocation to justify vicious military campaigns in Gaza and Lebanon, not unlike the agitation Iran is experiencing today.

The Israeli tactic has always been to make conditions so intolerable and unsustainable that a response of some kind by the affected group becomes inevitable. Whether it had been to starve and strangle Gazans by a stifling land, sea and air blockade and in effect imprisoning its population (who then responded by firing rather symbolic, fertilizer-based rockets) or the nearly two-decade long occupation of southern Lebanon to destroy the Palestine Liberation Organization and then Hezbollah, the approach always fails but not without great civilian casualty.

In both cases, acts of resistance to Israeli provocations were used as pretext for subsequent aerial bombing and military operations, "retaliatory measures" as routinely parroted by Western media. But Lebanon endured, ultimately ending the occupation and repelling the 2006 Israeli invasion while Gaza remained steadfast despite manifest hardship.

Currently, the refrain and cause for action is that of Iran interfering in the internal affairs of its neighbors. Although an open discussion of Iran's interests in the Arab world is not unreasonable, events on the ground preclude its realistic undertaking at present for it is Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates who are directly intervening in the affairs of

Yemen with daily air raids which have so decimated the country in an unsuccessful attempt to dislodge Ansarullah that a humanitarian catastrophe has developed; it is the Bahraini government which has rid itself of the trappings of civil society with dissenters routinely stripped of citizenship, journalists tortured and peaceful calls for representative government violently put-down; the advent of al-Qaeda and subsequently ISIS in Iraq and Syria and the similar religious ideology shared by these groups with their Saudi sponsors can also rightly be considered an example of unsolicited meddling in the affairs of each nation. Remarkably, it is these three countries which have been most vocal in accusing Iran of being behind the unrest.

The staggering loss of a life as a result of the ISIS caliphate and the Syrian war is still being tallied. In Iraq, the insertion of foreign fighters was a means to prevent the rise and stability of a popularly elected government in the post-Saddam era (as miserably as nascent Iraqi administrations managed to fail on their own) and in Syria to bring down an ally of Hezbollah and Iran.

Iran has only seen a brief reprieve from sanctions which have battered its economy despite compliance with the previously brokered nuclear treaty and no proof of an overt or covert nuclear weapons program. Additional American troops are being dispatched near its shores and new, crippling sanctions threatened.

The states who would like to see a war between Iran and the U.S. unfold are no mystery. As recent Middle East history teaches, the conflicts which have caused the most destruction and devastation have been at the hands of those who wanted to swallow Palestinian land, subjugate Lebanon, topple the Syrian leadership, restore the old guard in Iraq and install a pliant government in Yemen.

The instigators of the current Persian Gulf crisis, which if to get out of hand would lead to even greater tragedy, are one and the same.

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