American outlook on current US-Iran standoff

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Older people may recall the fears of many in 1972 that the bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong could lead to a crisis worse than the Caribbean. In the mid-1980s, few analysts expected a quick end to the Cold War. Many journalists and some scholars today claim to have a deep knowledge of the Middle East and the ability to predict the actions of each and every one, but we must admit that in reality the level of regional studies expertise in the United States is low, and even in combination with much deeper knowledge in the field of social sciences - does not allow us to step further.

Most of our generalizations are probabilistic in nature, and we are in a situation of strategic interaction when numerous actors are trying to anticipate the actions of others, knowing that they are doing the same. As Annie Tracy Samuel explained in his important article, how much people - the objects of study of scientists begin to believe in their theories, so theories turn into self-destructive prophecies, since people tend to avoid undesirable consequences. I suppose that neither President Trump nor the Iranians know what they will do next (and what they think they will do may differ from what they will actually do). Although analysts are capable of predicting events better than decision makers themselves, you should not particularly rely on this.

**Trump's decision was impulsive**

In fact, we still cannot clearly explain why Trump acted in this way, and not otherwise. Really interesting media reports were rare. Part of the story seems to be related to the attacks [on the US military base and embassy in Iraq )last month, and if these events were well covered in the American media, then I missed them. Therefore, we (or, at least, me) know little about the calculations of Iran and the associated armed groups, or how the US leadership analyzed them. However, I assume that Trump's decision was impulsive, and I doubt the preliminary serious analysis of the possible consequences. When the documents are declassified in 20 or 30 years, then (younger colleagues) it will be interesting to know whether the intelligence community received a request for an assessment of the consequences, and if so, what was the answer.

**Contrary to popular belief, as a rule, the military in the United States shows restraint**, but one should not underestimate the anger towards Soleimani of those who fought in Iraq. Years of research and work as the chairman of the CIA Advisory Group on the declassification of archival documents gives me reason to believe that even if senior military officials did not insist on the blow (and media reports say that they did not), they didn’t particularly protest because they hated Soleimani for his alleged role in the killing of American soldiers during the Iraq war.

**For Trump, the fact of the death of an American during an attack by armed groups on December 27, 2019 was especially important**. Similarly, earlier the death of another US citizen entailed his rejection of the agreement with the Taliban, which, obviously, was ready to be signed last fall. Today, as then, he said that he would toughly respond to any attack that would result in the death of the Americans (although there was no reaction to the attack of the Islamist Al-Shabab group in Kenya when three Americans were killed). This makes us hostages of fate: it is required that someone makes a decision to attack the American base or embassy, ​​but after launching missiles (guided or uncontrolled) the question of whether any American is hit becomes a matter of chance. Therefore, if Trump calculated everything in advance, then he had to be sure that either the other side (or, in fact, the side) will be forced to abandon the attack, or that there is so much free space at the bases that a blow to them is unlikely to hit anyone. The Iranian missile attacks did without casualties, but this has nothing to do with the actions of the Trump administration.

Now it seems likely that the Iranians will be satisfied with missile attacks on two American bases, which did not cause much damage and allowed Trump to refrain from continuing this cycle. Even if Iran launched rockets late at night, trying to minimize the likelihood of losses, this was accompanied by an unusually high level of luck. Even balancing on the brink of war provides a certain degree of theatricality. We call states and their leaders’ “actors” not only as a convenient figure of speech, but also because they have to speak to different audiences and can implicitly work with opponents to produce the desired impression. (Harvey, 2020)

**Of course, these may not be the last moves.** Regardless of how things turn out, the formal reason for the Soleimani murder is irrelevant. If the attacks were "inevitable", then they are ready for implementation without the further participation of Soleimani. The assumption of their abolition requires us to believe not only that Iran was able to be stopped, but also that Tehran fully controls all regional actors. Despite the political justification for Democrats' demands for [the legislature] intelligence information about the inevitability of attacks, in reality these demands only reflect political strife. The argument that killing will significantly reduce the ability of Iran and its “proxies” is also probably erroneous. There are studies on this score too - Jenna Jordan, Austin Long and others have shown that the liquidation of leaders does not lead to the decline of established organizations. (Pollack, 2013).

**Bin model**

I think in this case we are dealing with an example of what theorists of organizations roughly call the “bin model”. This applies to cases where the problem (in this case, the attack on the US Embassy in Baghdad) does not lead to the development of effective solutions, but rather to the search for familiar recipes (even from other sores). They are at hand, convenient and do not require rethinking, even if it is necessary. (The Iranian American Perspective On The U.S. And Iran, 2020)

Of course, deterrence is a more general justification for the strike. By pushing Iran in the nose, the United States showed that they would no longer put up with attacks and that Iran (and others) should expect serious retaliation for any subsequent adventures. This may still be true, which I doubt. **First**, although Iran’s leadership could have been taken by surprise by this murder, I think that Tehran has always been aware of the possibility of this. In other words, this move by the Americans will not be able to fundamentally change the Iranian assessment of the most likely actions of the United States in the future.

**Secondly**, even if this increased the level of perception of the likelihood of a violent force reaction (and even if this is a result that they seek to avoid), balancing factors may well work out that more than compensate for this threat. Iran may consider that the United States is in the mood for regime change, and that abstaining from provocations will not do any good. Leaders of various groups in Iran or Iraq may believe that if an aggressive American response damages their countries, raising public support may serve their personal interests. Accordingly, and thirdly, far from being “frightened,” local leaders or terrorists may consider the deepening of the conflict between Iran and the United States a welcome opportunity.

To summarize in this way, the success of a coercion strategy depends on the choices that the adversary makes. Taking such a bold step, Trump could think that he had seized the initiative and control over the situation, but this is not so. Iran could choose a concession as the option most suited to its interests but made a different choice. Despite the huge influence of the United States on the course of events, American well-being and the prospects for Trump's re-election are now in Iranian hands. The future of the United States and Iran is interdependent.

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