

## **FRIDAY: Unlike Obama, Trump Won't Run From Iran**

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The long overdue killing of Iran terror chief Gen. Qasem Soleimani is causing a great deal of buyer's remorse among many of Donald Trump's dovish backers. That is, those who hoped we would finally abandon the Middle East entirely and leave the endless war business to someone else. Exactly to whom though, they never say.

Some, such as Ron Paul, Pat Buchanan and Doug Bandow, of course, were already devoutly non-interventionist by the end of the Cold War. More recent doves, like Ann Coulter, Tucker Carlson and retired Army Col. Douglas Macgregor supported the Iraq War, but grew disillusioned with the Bush team's incompetence.

Then there is Col. Andrew Bacevich, in a class by himself. His aloof, elegant bearing and steely mannerism require him to treat any mere mortal, and their necessarily imperfect plans, with contempt. I wonder if at some point in the past, Bacevich, immaculately attired in full dress regalia, stared down Lt. Col. Alexander Vindman? Scrambled-egg visor to scrambled-egg visor: "Mister, this parade ground is scheduled for my unit!" "How dare you call me Mister! And we reserved this parade ground with the Interagency!" "All right then, it's the stockade for the both of you!" "You wouldn't dare. John Brennan already has your phones tapped!"

Of course, the other side of this, the so-called neo-cons, have not been any better. They always stand pat with a losing hand, rather than ever think about doing something different. Anyone would love to play table stakes poker with a Bill Kristol or John Bolton. The whole mess in Venezuela is largely due to the fact that Bolton thought he could fool Maduro into running away. Only, Maduro and his Russian friends knew all along the US had no support among our Latin allies to invade, nor had we set up an armed domestic opposition, nor turned enough of his generals.

Worst of all is the Democrats' be-nice-to-dictators policy. In a crisis, politicians like Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama send someone in to negotiate some worthless agreement in exchange for billions of dollars up front. Sometimes this gets complicated, as in Ukraine, where Obama allowed Vladimir Putin a free hand, yet deep-state characters like Victoria Nuland freelanced the 2014 revolution. Then Democrat greed-heads got involved, sensing the massive influence and graft opportunities, along with some nominal Republicans, such as the CIA's Cofer Black. Poor Obama didn't know who he was to sell out or protect.

Similarly, Europeans like Angela Merkel love to pose as the protectors of Ukraine, only she never gave that country any military help and has instead handed Putin's economy a lifeline with the absurd Nord Stream gas pipeline. Well aware of this, President Trump has rightly been skeptical of advice from the so-called experts.

On Ukraine, he has been sanctioning Merkel's pipeline, and sending some weapons, while encouraging Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky to seek a modus vivendi with Putin. Not a bad strategy, using both carrots and sticks to get to a better strategic place.

In the Middle East, Trump is a great fan of Israel and Bibi Netanyahu. So, when Bibi advises not leaving the area, that carries a lot of weight. So does his similarly inclined son-in-law Jared, thankfully no longer on the immigration beat; and a big supporter of Saudi Prince bin Salman.

Notice, though, Trump's idea is not simply the status quo there, either. In the Kurd-Syria flare-up, Trump was roundly excoriated at first. But we and our friends are in a much better positioned now. We gave up on a narrow strip of villages on the Turkish border, militarily hopeless, and controlled by Kurds we don't really trust and who have longstanding ties with the Russians. But in the new arrangement in Syria, the border strip is split between the Turks and the Russians. The Kurds are under the protection of the Russians and have their own defensible areas, with oil reserves, in the northeast of Syria. This is so much better strategically for us. It gets the Turks off our back about Kurdish terrorists and we won't end up pushing that country out of NATO. Likewise, the Russians are no longer jealous of our position in Syria. Instead, they're stuck mediating between their Kurd friends and the Syrians, while having to watch out for ISIS and the Turks.

I expect Trump is working on a similar reshuffle with Iraq and Afghanistan. He wants to find a peaceful conclusion with the mullahs and the Taliban and is willing to give them quite a bit. But don't expect him to send in Wendy Sherman to sell out our friends. If somebody wants to fight, there is an American missile with their name on it. In the same vein, Trump's comment about bombing Iran's cultural sites was just a message to the ayatollah: "Don't hide in a mosque. We'll kill you there, too!"

As it stands, there are very few Americans at risk in the Middle East. Far more of our soldiers die every year in training accidents than in all the active combat zones where they serve. There is understandably impatience to finally end these conflicts, but there is no reason to panic. There ought to be some American strategy besides simply running away when the shooting starts, or making our soldiers sitting ducks for the terrorists. Given President Trump's very healthy skepticism of the Washington experts, in and out of uniform, he may very well perfect such a strategy.