**30 Seconds over Natanz**

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Given reports of Iran’s continuing uranium enrichment program in its Natanz’ nuclear facilities, according to the New York Times, on November 12th, the president met with his key national security advisors to discuss striking those nuclear facilities. The president, apparently, was keen to take action.

His advisors, fearing consequences that were unpredictable and unacceptable, cautioned restraint.

Today, certain indicators suggest that an American pre-emptive military strike against Iran’s nuclear programs is still possible however unlikely. Central Command deployed a B-52 bomber to the region in a show of force. Two American carrier strike groups are in the region as are a number of nuclear submarines carrying Tomahawk cruise missiles.

In a not so secret and unprecedented meeting in Saudi Arabia, Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu met with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, an advocate of regime change in Iran. No diplomatic breakthroughs took place other than the meeting itself. But the assassination last weekend of Iran’s top nuclear scientist Moshen Fakhrizadeh did not seem coincidental.

In 1995, Bill Clinton approved cruise missile strikes against a suspected chemical weapons plant in Kenya that was actually producing weed killer. And George W. Bush’s crusade into Iraq was founded on destroying weapons of mass destruction that did not exist.

One possibility is that this assassination may have been timed to provoke an Iranian response that in turn could serve as justification for retaliatory action. This would fulfill Donald Trump’s promise that Iran would never have a nuclear weapon. And it would leave the Biden administration, that Trump still asserts was fraudulently elected, to clean up the radioactive political mess left behind.

Suppose President Trump declared Iran to be a “clear and present danger” requiring immediate action. Suppose further, Trump ordered the Acting Secretary of Defense to execute an attack. Several former Secretaries of Defense and Chairmen of the JCS told me that such an order was probably legal. While the order might also be catastrophic, it was not at face value unethical or immoral. Previous presidents have done worse with even weaker rationale.

Based on a second North Vietnamese PT boat attack against two US Navy destroyers in the Tonkin Gulf in August 1964 that did not take place, President Lyndon Johnson used the incident to gain a near unanimous Congressional resolution to engage in a war that would be lost. In 1995, Bill Clinton approved cruise missile strikes against a suspected chemical weapons plant in Kenya that was actually producing weed killer. And George W. Bush’s crusade into Iraq was founded on destroying weapons of mass destruction that did not exist.

What would Acting Secretary of Defense Chris Miller do? Would he have the courage as Attorneys General did during the Nixon years and not carry out the presidential order to fire the special prosecutor investigating Watergate? Would he follow the lead of then Secretary of Defence James Schlesinger, concerned about Nixon’s mental state during the October 1973 Arab-Israeli War, who instructed the field commanders to respond only to orders directly from him and no one else per the chain of command?

If Miller, a Trump loyalist placed in the Pentagon to do Trump’s bidding, believed the law to be legal, ordered the responsible operational commander to execute it, what would the commander do? Note that the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Army General Mark Milley, is not in the chain of command.

Nor is Congress part of this process except through the War Powers Act that does not immediately apply or the power to declare war which the president would not request. It is clear that the responsible operational commander would consult with his lawyers and certainly the chairman about that order. Whether the order could or would be rescinded is an open question.

The order could be leaked. Given the tightly controlled access list, that might be difficult. The order for Seal Team 6 to capture or kill Osama bin Laden was kept secret until after the operation was successfully completed. But according to the Constitution, the president has the authority as commander-in-chief to direct such actions.

If US forces stationed in land bases in the region were part of the strike, would allies need to be informed in advance? During the 1986 Libyan strike, France refused overflights of US bombers enroute to targets from bases in Britain and the US Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar could also refuse access if they were informed.

Donald Trump tested the basis of America’s democracy by calling the election “rigged” and a “fraud.” Given Trump’s track record as unpredictable and purposefully disruptive, could he also conclude that, in his final days in office, an attack against Iran’s nuclear facilities was warranted? How would the system respond? The system worked in electing Joe Biden the 46th president. But would it work again?

We can only hope we do not have to find out.

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