



Finding a Measured Response to Iran's Activities

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This fifth issue of the MES Monograph Series features a paper by Major Bradley N. Fultz (USMC) on finding measured responses that the United States can employ to engage the Islamic Republic of Iran based on the tit for tat strategy of game theory. Major Fultz finished this paper while attached to MES as part of the AFPAK Hands program in 2012-2013.

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Finding a Measured Response to Iran's Activities

by Bradley N. Fultz

“Carrot and Stick” is the current diplomatic approach used by the U.S. Department of State regarding Iran. The term carrot and stick does not translate well in Persian. In fact, it portrays the image of a master standing in front of a donkey using carrots as a reward for appropriate behavior, and beatings when the donkey steps out of line as to teach a memorable lesson. For it is the donkey that is not smart enough to understand commands, nuance, altruism, and balance. Reward and punishment motivate the donkey to bend to its masters will. This is an offensive image in the mind of the Iranians, the descendants of the rich and advanced Persian culture. Cultural sensitivities aside, is the carrot and stick approach the proper one when dealing with the Iranians? It is not the carrot and stick analogy with all its simplicity that is most applicable, but tit for tat. Both sides have loosely followed tit for tat since the Islamic Revolution of 1979. What do the events of the past thirty-three years in which the U.S. and Iran have squared off in what David Crist titles a “Twilight War” teach us about dealing with Iran tactically, operationally and strategically?¹ Is it appropriate to bend to Iranian will while respecting Tehran’s interests and expect altruistic policies to be reciprocated accordingly? Are the interests of the United States and Iran so wholly opposed that any divergence from *Realpolitik* will be viewed as weakness ultimately compromising U.S. interests? As the drums of war with Iran beat in cyclical patterns within policy circles in Washington, it is important to include the lessons of the past in application of strategic and tactical decisions of the future.

This monograph analyzes a significant number of recent incidents between the U.S. and the Islamic Republic. Basis for the analysis is the tit for tat model (taken from Game theory as described below). The independent variable is the character of confrontation and the dependent variable is the nature of responses between the two actors. Due to a slew of reasons and conflicting interests that will be outlined, disagreements between the U.S. and Iran are a near certainty. It is the nature of responses however that will shape future conduct. The tit for tat model provides the most effective foundation for determining and predicting the appropriate nature of response. Use of force in encounters vis-à-vis Iran will be examined, and the consequences of backing down in comparison to meeting threats with aggressive responses will be analyzed. In other cases, government rhetoric and responses to it will be considered. The work will provide ideas for consideration vice direct policy driven recommendations.

Tit for Tat, otherwise known as equivalent retaliation was initially introduced as a gaming strategy to solve the Prisoners Dilemma in Robert Axelrod’s book, *The Evolution of Cooperation*. In his study based on computer gaming models, Axelrod concluded tit for tat provided the most beneficial outcome when “coping in an environment of mutual power.”² Axelrod concludes that what makes tit for tat so successful is its combination of “being nice, retaliatory, forgiving, and clear.”³ Tit for tat does not have solely negative or positive connotations. The model begins with a placating move and then responds according to its

adversary on every subsequent interaction. Therefore, tit for tat models begin with cooperation, are immediately forgiving, and ignore previous interactions, regardless of how negative they may be. In the same sense, a negative behavior is responded to in kind, every time. Furthermore, the model is clear and understandable, making long-term cooperation more likely. The gaming model was proven as effective as it was simple in multiple tests pitted against a wide variety of other computer models.⁴ But the world is not a computer and intra-state relationships are not games.

International relations cannot be based solely on computer gaming models. Other stressors and influencers affect even the simplest of decisions in foreign policy, domestic constraints being primary amongst them. Contrary to the gaming model, reciprocity has varied values, meaning that responses to a defection of behavioral norms vary depending on their severity, and as Peter Munson states, “memories matter.”⁵ Each actor will rate the severity of a cooperative or antagonistic behavior based on their own interpretation of the situation. What is an appropriate response to Iranian antagonism? Is a softer, perhaps more altruistic counter to aggression apt to invite reciprocity, or encourage further belligerence? The analysis provides historical background to appropriate and inappropriate responses to Iranian actions and accompanying consequences to those respective decisions, all within the tit for tat framework.

Based on recent history and thirty-three years of tactical and operational level decision-making by the Iranian regime, one can find consistencies in behaviors when facing confrontation. Victory in a confrontation is not solely defined by holding physical ground, but holds a more modern interpretation of also coercing the adversary to bend to ones will. The axiom of “war is politics carried out by other means” is certainly applicable in this research.⁶ Iran is apt to make decisions based on the Realist model of interstate relations meaning simply that Tehran is most likely to act in self-interest viewing any interactions with the United States as a zero sum game. Iran will be skeptical in pursuing moral or altruistic objectives in this relationship and will continue to antagonize perceived and real threats until faced with harsh responses making the confrontation no longer advantageous.⁷ Historically Tehran has backed down from encounters when opposed strongly and has searched for alternative or indirect ways to deescalate the given situation. History also shows Iran rarely compromises its ends, but adeptly adjusts its means. For a breakthrough in cooperation to occur; if a breakthrough is even possible, the United States must make public spectacles of moderation and allow Iran to look the diplomatic victor. That may not be what is best for America, or its allies however. An Iran unchained by international pressure could quickly become a menace in the region and throughout the world.

Modern relations between Iran and the United States trace back to 1945 when President Franklin D. Roosevelt met with Saudi King Abd al-Aziz Ibn Saud to create the Arab-American Oil Company, marking the official beginning of U.S. oil interests in the region. Key events since include the 1946 U.S. stand against Soviet troops remaining in Iran, the 1948 creation of the State of Israel, the 1953 CIA backed ousting of Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeq, and the marriage of convenience between the United States and the Shah of Iran in the years between 1953 and 1978.⁸ All mark as foundations for the relationship between the two nations. Although the seeds of dissent are rooted, (especially on the Iranian side) it is the admittance of the Shah of Iran into the United States for medical treatment and the subsequent sacking of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran in late 1979 which marks the turning point of official and government hostility between the two states. The sacking of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran is the point in history where legitimate grievances of the past were finally exposed within the international arena. This event also serves as the launch point of this monograph.

Incidents of confrontation between the United States and the Islamic Republic: 1978-2012

Hostage taking and U.S. response

On 4 November 1979 Islamist youths stormed and occupied the U.S. Embassy in Tehran taking sixty-six American citizens and diplomats hostage in the process. This ordeal enflamed by revolutionary zeal was adopted by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and lasted 444 days until 20 January 1981. The fifty-two remaining hostages were freed the day Ronald Reagan was inaugurated President of the United States. The Iran Hostage crisis should not be looked at in a vacuum, but in the context of other events of the time. International events of the era clearly show the severity of world affairs and sober the pessimists of today. In the months between February and December of 1979 a number of substantial circumstances collided. The Shah of Iran was replaced by Ayatollah Khomeini concluding one of the most dramatic revolutions in the history of the world, Iran isolated itself internationally through the sacking of the U.S. Embassy, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan immediately to Iran's east, and finally in September of 1980 the Iraqi Army invaded Iran.

During the Iran hostage crisis one military engagement was attempted. A daring poorly timed and planned special operations mission named Operation Eagle Claw, which resulted in the crashing of a U.S. helicopter into a refueling jet in the middle of the Iranian desert. The mission was aborted and eight U.S. service personnel were killed. The events surrounding the hostage crisis were a debacle, a public humiliation and ultimately contributed to the downfall of the Carter Administration. The failure of the Eagle Claw mission scored a major victory for the new Islamic regime and likely "prolonged the crisis... as the witnessing of yet another American humiliation reinforced the determination" of Iran.⁹ Operation Eagle Claw was not the sole attempt to free the hostages. The U.S. used economic sanctions, international isolation, and attempted diplomacy to reestablish relations with the Iranian regime and get the hostages released. No outside stressors attempted motivated the revolutionary government to release the hostages. The attack on the embassy and subsequent hostage taking was viewed domestically as a justified response to over twenty-five years of American intervention in Iran, a clear message to the West that Iran was no longer a puppet and would be treated as an independent and strong equal.¹⁰ Tehran's greatest concern during the revolution was its legitimacy in the eyes of the Iranian people. The hostage taking energized the base of the regimes support, united the country and consolidated power during this weakened time.¹¹ By August of 1980, less than a year following the hostage taking Ayatollah Khomeini gave the instructions to find a solution to the hostage crisis because "it was no longer in Iran's interest to prolong it."¹² A month later, when Iraq invaded into the Iranian oil-rich province of Khuzestan, the hostages had become a true burden. Saddam Hussein's Iraq replaced the hostages as the required unifying villain.¹³

There are two primary lessons from this ordeal. First, the relative international indifference to the September 1980 Iraqi invasion into Khuzestan indicated a form of isolation detrimental to regime survival. Secondly, the hostages were no longer serving the purpose of uniting the nation under the new government. Adversely, the hostages were becoming a hindrance and justification for the world to ignore the Iraqi violation of the internationally recognized Algiers Accord.¹⁴ It came down to calculation of threats and pragmatic interests for the revolutionary regime. In retrospect, the Carter Administration has taken significant criticism for not acting more firmly with the Iranians in the wake of the hostage crisis. U.S. calculation prevented action against the Iranians as long as they controlled the hostages. This paralyzed a military response. The U.S. could not invade for fear the hostages would be killed. On the other hand it was exactly this weak and predictable reaction that allowed Tehran to dictate how the crisis would play out. The inaction of the United States likely set the stage for future antagonistic behaviors by the Iranians towards U.S. interests in the region. An aggressive move on behalf of the Carter Administration would have certainly forced the

Iranians to alter their own estimations, if not in 1980 than in future encounters. The needed aggressive move that arrived with no coordination with the U.S., came from the Iraqi army, who themselves were looking to gain advantage from the Iranian weakened and divided situation.

U.S. Support for Iraq during Iran-Iraq War

On 22 September 1980, six months of skirmishes between neighbors climaxed when twenty-two Iraqi Army divisions crossed into Iran reclaiming disputed territory. Iraq's stated political objective was the desire to expand control and gain access to Persian Gulf resources, but also realize the Saddam Hussein's self-identified goal of leader of the Arab world.¹⁵ The widely held belief in Tehran, and an insight into the Iranian conspiracy laden psyche, was that President Jimmy Carter and the United States were behind the attack. Silence by the United Nations in the face of blatant disregard for international law further confirmed the invasion was merely affront by the United States and the duplicitous international body to destroy the Islamic Republic.¹⁶

Although still debated in academic circles it appears President Carter never gave Iraq the proverbial "Green Light" to invade Iran.¹⁷ In fact it is actually laughable to believe the United States, which did not even maintain an interests section in Baghdad at the time, would have had the influence or authority to do such a thing. The narrative usually trumps truth and the belief the United States in an act of revenge for the overthrowing of the Shah, the taking of hostages at the embassy, and in order to reclaim influence in Iran coerced Iraq to invade. Iran demonized the attack and championed its struggle against the meddling West. Privately however, there must have been concern in Tehran. On 20 January 1981, four months after the Iraqi invasion began, all remaining American hostages were released from Iranian custody.¹⁸

The momentum of the Iraqi invasion halted by 1982 and a pervading fear took hold in Washington that an Iranian counter attack might force the Iraqi army to fold and consequently Saddam Hussein would fall from power leaving Iranian regional dominance unchecked.¹⁹ A collapsing Iraqi government would require the United States to commit ground forces to the region or face a massive shift regarding oil policy in the Gulf. Like in 1979, the international context of 1982 must be considered. The Soviets were in Afghanistan, Israel's invasion into Lebanon was stalling, Shia militias in southern Lebanon were gaining strength under guidance from Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) mentors, and the Sunni monarchs were threatened from the growing Iranian menace.

Between 1981 and 1982 diplomatic correspondence between Washington and Tehran consisted of little more than verbal assaults. In the summer of 1982 though the exchanges escalated and U.S. policy motivated Iranian action. As the Iranians threatened the strategically significant Basra, the White House removed Iraq as a state sponsor of terrorism and began providing intelligence to the Iraqi Army. It is unclear as to exactly how much the Iranians knew regarding this intelligence sharing agreement, but the Iranians responded.²⁰ On 6 June of the same year the Israel Defense Forces invaded into Southern Lebanon in pursuit of Palestinian fighters. Shortly thereafter, the lead element of what would eventually become an 800 strong detachment of IRGC members landed in Damascus with the mission of organizing a proxy movement among the Lebanese Shia to resist the Israelis and perceived Western led modern day colonialism in Lebanon.²¹ The two unrelated events provided operating space for revolutionary Iran to expand its interests and the opportunity to respond to American provocations of supporting Saddam Hussein.

The Conflict Expands: Beirut, Lebanon

On 23 October 1983, Lebanese Shia militants trained, armed and funded by Iran drove a truck laden with explosives into the U.S. Marine Barracks at the Beirut airport killing 241 U.S. service personnel. The attack

was directed by the Iranian government, “the Iranians were always in charge of the IJO [Islamic Jihad Organization—group that later became Hezbollah], using it to establish a beachhead in Lebanon. Every attack, car bombing, kidnapping and assassination carried out by ... [the IJO] was approved by the IRGC, which in turn was approved by Iran’s Supreme Leader.”²² The bombing of the Marine Barracks was no exception. U.S. intelligence intercepts show the Iranian ambassador to Beirut was aware of the scheme and “Ayatollah Khomeini likely gave final approval for the attack.”²³ Although harsh rhetoric emanating from Tehran was continuous, the bombing of the U.S. Embassy in April of 1983, the bombing of the Marine Barracks six months later, and the attack on the U.S. Embassy annex in September 1984 were indeed direct reactions to increasing assistance for Iraqi military forces. Shortly following the Marine Barracks bombing, a similar attack on the French peacekeepers headquarters resulted in the death of fifty-eight French paratroopers. It confirmed the link of support for Iraq as the Iranians were responding to French aircraft sales to the Iraqi government.²⁴ The day of the attack should not be considered insignificant either. 23 October 1983 was the four-year anniversary of the Shah’s arrival in the United States for cancer treatment, the event that triggered the takeover of the embassy in the first place.

Bombing hardened structures was not the sole Iranian method to strike American interests in Lebanon. Shia proxies in the Levant proved beneficial in kidnapping as well. Kidnapping not only struck fear in the hearts of Westerners operating around the world, but the handsome ransoms paid to secure a hostages release was a lucrative business venture. Under the direction of the IRGC, U.S. CIA station chief to Beirut, William F. Buckley was kidnapped on 16 March 1984 and tortured horrifically at the hands of Hezbollah, ultimately leading to his death.²⁵ It is believed the station chief was kidnapped as part of a movement to resist Western presence in Lebanon, and be traded for Hezbollah operatives imprisoned in Kuwait.²⁶ Without a doubt the masterminds of the attack were in Iran.²⁷ The incident kicked off one of the most bizarre and embarrassing tales in the history of the United States.

Arms for Hostages (The Iran-Contra Affair)

The United States supplied weapons and parts needed by the Iranians to Israel who in turn shipped those weapons to Tehran. The money exchanged to Israel for the weapons was returned to the United States. This money was used to fund Contra rebels in Nicaragua fighting the Communist, Cuba-friendly Sandinista government. All of this took place with the knowledge of President Reagan, without Congressional oversight, and in violation of the laws of the United States. Not surprisingly, the whole circus got leaked to the press and resulted in numerous firings, resignations, and nearly the impeachment of the President. The question here is why this happened, and how was it perceived in the context of tit for tat with the Iranians? The United States was betraying allies and ignoring domestic laws in order to do business with fundamentalists in Tehran. Why?

Two primary factors explain American reasoning during the highly controversial Arms for Hostages’ deal. First, President Reagan was adamant about getting hostages in Beirut freed, especially CIA station chief Buckley. U.S. diplomats paraded as hostages in Tehran were still fresh in the minds of the American voter, and the consequences to President Carter’s legacy were clear. Secondly, the Reagan Administration believed a moderate element with influence in Tehran existed. Behind the scenes negotiations allegedly potentially lead to a reopening of the relationship with Iran. Although this second argument is still disputed as to whether a true motivation or not, the idea of rapprochement in the Persian Gulf was likely an attractive development for anti-Soviet hawks in Washington.²⁸

Ultimately the Iran-Contra/Arms for Hostages deal collapsed into a total fiasco. It was a black eye on the face of the Administration and had negative effects on U.S. foreign policy to the Middle East for the next

several years. The key learning point is when the United States attempted to negotiate with the Iranians from a position of weakness it lost big. Much like during the U.S. Embassy hostage crisis, had some decisions been made differently the dynamic of the negotiations would have likely changed. The question asked by the Administration was justifiably how to best free our hostages? But the question should have been how to make the cost of taking and holding American hostages higher than it is worth? What did Iran gain from having American hostages? They gained direct access to weapons from the United States to include TOW anti-tank missiles and other high-end munitions along with needed parts to maintain aging hardware.²⁹ The White House also took incredible domestic risks by authorizing such transactions. What were the costs? The Iranians essentially lost nothing. Ultimately it was Shia groups in Lebanon conducting the bombings and kidnappings. The ability to deflect accountability while also gaining from negotiations made the entire ordeal in Tehran's benefit.³⁰ A pragmatic analysis shows clearly that releasing the hostages would have countered Iranian interests.

Between 1983 and 1986 Iranian proxies in Lebanon conducted three major attacks and numerous minor tactical level kinetic actions against the United States. Additionally, multiple U.S. citizens to include the President of the American University in Beirut and the CIA station chief were kidnapped, the latter being tortured to death. The response from the Reagan administration was weak and likely invited increasingly provocative Iranian behavior. Despite evidence of Iranian support, knowledge of Qods Force locations inside of Lebanon, and a French government hopeful to avenge the attack on its own troops, the United States failed to respond to the truck bombings of U.S. diplomatic missions and the Marine Barracks.³¹ Also, negotiating to get hostages back allowed the Iranians to dictate the tempo of the relationship. This futile attempt at striking a bargain with the Islamic Republic was doomed from the start, and the U.S. received nothing but a lot of bad press and congressional investigations. This lesson should never be forgotten.

How the Ayatollah Khomeini viewed the U.S. response or lack thereof is still unknown. The Reagan Administration was aware of Iranian coordination and planning in the attacks on U.S. installations and the kidnapping of U.S. persons. Two enduring lessons emerge from Lebanon in the 1980's. First, the IRGC found ways to strike the United States without being accountable, maintained deniability, and made kinetic response very difficult. Second, by operating in this gray area between not doing anything and conducting attacks that would invite U.S. reprisals the Iranians deftly exploited a weak spot in U.S. policy. Indecisiveness regarding military retaliation likely encouraged further belligerence that in both the short and long term has been detrimental to the interests of the United States and its allies. It was the actions of a small proxy organization that forced the Marines out of Beirut and provided a lot of maneuver space for Hezbollah, who today maintain a strong presence in the Lebanese government. Iran was never held accountable for its support of Hezbollah, nor for the attacks on U.S. personnel and installations. Towards the end of the decade however, Iran over played its hand and directly threatened U.S. oil interests leading to direct confrontations between naval forces in the Persian Gulf.

The Tanker War

The Tanker War, starting in 1984, began as a series of naval altercations between Iranian and Iraqi forces mostly focused on attacking merchant shipping supporting their respective adversaries operations. In 1986 and 1987 in response to Kuwait's financial and political support for Iraq, Iranian naval forces began to target Kuwaiti flagged shipping transiting the Persian Gulf. Kuwait looking to protect its merchant ships requested Kuwaiti tankers transiting the Gulf fly the U.S. flag therefore protecting them from Iranian attacks. Playing both sides, Kuwait concurrently asked the Soviet Union for similar protections. This not only ensured safeguarding of Kuwaiti shipping but also introduced Cold War competition into the Gulf. The Soviet Union seeing an opportunity to get a military presence in the Gulf accepted while bureaucratic hold

ups slowed the approval process in the United States. With the flagging of Kuwaiti ships by superpowers, Iran did not hesitate to invoke violent and threatening rhetoric, which it was also willing to back up, albeit temporarily.

In January of 1987 Soviet warships under agreement with the Kuwaiti government entered the Persian Gulf to commence escort operations of Kuwaiti flagged ships. On 6 May of the same year, Iranian speedboats patrolling the Persian Gulf attacked the Soviet merchant ship *Ivan Korotyev*. Ten days later the Soviet frigate *Marshal Zhukove* struck an Iranian emplaced mine while conducting transit through international waters. Soviets responded by stating they would retaliate to any attacks and further added “the Soviet Union reserved the right to act according to international law if provocative actions with regards to Soviet ships were repeated.”³² The Soviets also sent a message by flying nearly fifty warplanes into Iranian airspace.³³ One Soviet diplomat stated “this was a field warning to the Iranians who were told later that Moscow would not allow another incident of this type, even if it meant direct Soviet military intervention.”³⁴

After the reality of witnessing Soviet warships in the Gulf sunk in, the U.S. quickly untangled its own bureaucratic hurdles and approved escort operations. The first mission titled “Earnest Will” occurred on 21 July 1987 involved the re-flagging and escort of Kuwaiti oil tankers as they transited the Persian Gulf from the Straits of Hormuz to Kuwait. Upon the much publicized launch of the initial convoy, Iranian F-4’s strafed the skies at 10,000 feet above the ships pattern, not tailing off back into Iranian air space until being locked on by the U.S. Navy’s anti-aircraft radars.³⁵ The U.S. flagged tanker and her U.S. Naval escort convoy sailed without incident through the “Silkworm envelope,” an area garnering the most significant amount of U.S. attention due to the close proximity of U.S. ships to missile launch sites containing recently purchased Chinese Silkworm missiles.³⁶ The launching of a Silkworm at a U.S. warship or U.S. flagged tanker would have most certainly met a strong response from the United States, consequently bringing America deeper into the Iran-Iraq War.³⁷ The Iranians, presumably not wishing to antagonize an escalation opted to lay mines in the northern Persian Gulf instead. The giant tanker, *Bridgeton*, under U.S. naval escort struck one of these Iranian laid mines, but was able to limp into its Kuwaiti destination without loss of life. The “Bridgeton Incident” was viewed as an embarrassment to the United States Navy. The escort operations developed amongst heated domestic political debate as to the benefit versus the risks of undergoing such military adventures.³⁸ The attack was a calculated measure by the Iranians to strike in a way that would force a reconsideration of the mission. The U.S. did not respond to the mining incident claiming that only if American lives were lost would retaliation take place, a decision that would receive further scrutiny and have further implications.³⁹

The weeks following the Bridgeton incident, Iranian actions became more bellicose. IRGC naval exercises in the Gulf accompanied threatening rhetoric such as: “the Persian Gulf is the burial place of Reagan.”⁴⁰ On 1 August, Iran clandestinely sent approximately 275 armed IRGC members into Saudi Arabia with orders to disrupt the Hajj celebration and instigate an uprising against the Saudi royal family. Intelligence intercepts tipped the authorities to the plot and awaiting Saudi security forces killed nearly 300 Iranians. On 10 August a Panamanian tanker struck a mine off the port of Khor Fakkan, U.A.E., outside of the Persian Gulf and east of the Straits of Hormuz. Days later a Swedish vessel struck an Iranian laid mine in the same area killing the captain and four crew- members. The two mine attacks indicated Iran’s desire to expand its engagement area by mining outside the Straits and using the Straits themselves as the key terrain to protect. From a tactical perspective, it was the outer layer of a traditional defense in depth. The short-term tactical victory however, became a strategic blunder. Directly attacking neutral vessels operating in international waters was not popular in European capitals. The mining outside of the Straits along with the attempted disruption of the Hajj shifted international opinion strongly against the Iranian regime. European nations responded by dispatching desperately needed mine sweeping ships along with naval vessels to conduct

required escort duties. Iran needlessly isolated itself diplomatically and responded by backing off its mine-laying efforts considerably.

In this case, Iran antagonized until there was a significant strategic loss ultimately resulting in the expansion of opposing nations. The American question was: how to stop Iran from mining? The question should have been: how to create painful consequences for laying mines in the Persian Gulf? In this case, international opinion shifting against Iran was sufficient. Mining to the east of the Straits was not only a strategic miscalculation as world opinion turned against the regime, but also an operational mistake, enabling Western mine sweeping equipment into the Gulf.

The tactical pause following the international condemnation provided needed time for U.S. Navy intelligence personnel to reevaluate the best counter measures available to mine warfare. New assets were introduced in theater, namely special operations MH-6 and AH-6 night capable Little Bird helicopters. Improved intelligence targeting Iranian mine laying capabilities, combined with the flexibility of the Little Birds provided a considerable advantage for the United States. On 18 September 1987, the Iranian naval vessel, *Iran Ajr* was spotted loading mines in port at Bandar Abbas. Its intent was to mine the primary channel directly entering Bahrain.⁴¹ Little Bird helicopters vectored to gain up-close surveillance of the ship observed its drifting into international waters. Upon the detection of mines on board and subsequent mine-laying by the crewmembers, the helicopters conducted numerous attack runs, killing three and capturing twenty-six along with the ship itself, which was eventually sunk in the middle of the Gulf. The Iran Ajr incident was condemned broadly by the Iranian government with a mix of wild threatening statements regarding an American attack on a peaceful cargo ship. "Iran's response will not be restricted to the Gulf," claimed President and future Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, privately however there must have been some soul searching taking place.⁴² The occurrence was an absolute tactical victory for the United States. Iran ceased to emplace mines in the Gulf for the next six months.⁴³

The U.S. Navy took advantage of the pause in enemy activity by establishing mobile sea bases in the Gulf, one of which was placed a mere twenty nautical miles from the strategically vital, Iranian Farsi Island. The more aggressive U.S. presence antagonized an Iranian reaction. On 8 October 1987 while engaging in air patrols, Special Operations Little Birds identified a small Iranian presence staging for further actions in the vicinity of the sea base. The Little Birds took fire from the Iranians and quickly responded destroying the two patrol ships and an Iranian Boghammer warship.⁴⁴ Iranian reinforcements withdrew prior to confronting the Little Birds and the single U.S. patrol boat in the vicinity of the engagement. The Little Birds coincidentally stumbled upon a major naval operation intended to attack the Saudi mainland. The IRGC command assumed the U.S. had been tipped off and American and Saudi forces were waiting in ambush and recalled the force back to the Iranian mainland.⁴⁵

After mine laying endeavors and surprise attacks failed the Iranians adopted a new tactic to resist the Americans. On 16 and 17 October 1987 the IRGC launched Silkworm missile into the port of Kuwait striking a Liberian tanker and the U.S. flagged ship, the *Sea Isle City*. The ship was already in port, which made lawful retaliation a bit foggy due to the regulations of the escort mission. From one perspective the ship was in Kuwait, and not being escorted by the U.S. Navy, on the other hand, it was a U.S. flagged ship.⁴⁶ The Iranians found a gray area between full antagonism and placation, a common behavioral theme that continues to endure. The response however, would leave little doubt about U.S. willingness to act in the Persian Gulf.

Unwilling to allow the missile launch to go without reprisal, the U.S. conducted Operation Nimble Archer on 19 October targeting Rashdat oil platform, located in international waters southeast of Qatar. U.S. Navy

ships with air support assaulted and destroyed the three-platform complex. The attack conducted to answer the Iranian Silkworm strikes, was viewed as a mild response in the region.⁴⁷ Days later the Iranians launched another Silkworm at the Kuwaiti Sea Island export terminal halting oil exports from there while under repair. The U.S. did not counter this strike, and ten days after the export terminal was repaired in November, the facility was struck again.

Despite the missile strikes in Kuwait, Iranian resistance to the transit mission slowed through the beginning of 1988. Improved defenses of forward areas and increased surveillance activities all while maintaining the escort mission strengthened the American operations. In addition to the low-level conflict in the Gulf, the Iranians were on their heels in the fight with the Iraqis. Saddam Hussein had begun to employ chemical munitions on the front lines as well as bomb Iranian cities. Both atrocities went relatively ignored by the international community. Additionally the Iranian economy was in the midst of a three year recession. The situation was growing dire for Tehran. On 14 April 1988 as the USS *Roberts* was transiting off the northern coast of Qatar conducting escort operations as part of Earnest Will the ship struck a powerful Iranian mine, nearly sinking the ship. The American reply would be the first and only major naval battle between Iran and the United States.

The United States reacted swiftly and fiercely to the Roberts attack and struck Iranian facilities and naval power in the Persian Gulf. The U.S. Navy organized a plan to seize and destroy two Iranian platforms and one Iranian frigate, withholding from hitting the Iranian mainland but effectively slowing the Iranians ability to conduct operations. Coordinated offensives on the morning of 18 April destroyed the two intended Iranian platforms and actions throughout the day resulted in the annihilation of three Iranian frigates. Operation Praying Mantis killed nearly sixty and wounded over one-hundred Iranian sailors.⁴⁸ Coincidentally the Iraqi Army simultaneously launched a full-scale assault using chemical munitions to retake al-Faw peninsula. In response, the Iranians attacked civilian platforms in the Gulf linked to U.S. business interests, but no direct counter attack aimed at American combatants followed. The Iranians received the worst in all engagements. The U.S. Navy, despite losing one helicopter, which crashed into the water killing the two pilots, was completely overwhelming.

Throughout the course of the escort mission, The United States indicated to the Iranian regime that use of Silkworm missiles would be considered a “serious provocation,” threatening to escalate the military conflict in the Gulf, and a declaration of war.⁴⁹ The Iranians never launched the Silkworm at U.S. Navy vessels for fear of retaliation. Or did they? During Operation Praying Mantis, the USS *Gary* patrolling in the northern Persian Gulf and the USS *Jack Williams* operating hundreds of miles to the south nearly simultaneously reported taking incoming Silkworm missiles. In both instances, there was an impact in the distance. A later Pentagon report found the claims of Silkworm launches to be untrue, and blamed faulty radar reads. Controversy and contention as to whether Silkworms were actually fired exists. Accounts from reporters onboard the USS *Jack Williams* claim Silkworm missiles were indeed inbound during Praying Mantis.⁵⁰ Lee Allen Zatarian’s book *The Tanker War* makes a convincing argument relating to a Pentagon cover-up while not desiring to respond to a Silkworm attack on U.S. ships. Expanding the conflict was politically unpopular and opposed by the Reagan Administration.⁵¹ David Crist in his account of the Tanker War in his book *The Twilight War* claims the reports released from the Pentagon were accurate and during the fog of war amidst the activities of 18 April, the sailors and officers of the USS *Jack Williams* and USS *Gary* were mistaken in identifying the incoming missiles to be Silkworms.⁵² In the context of Iranian decision making and the willingness to escalate the conflict in a tit for tat manner the debate surrounding the launching of Silkworm missiles is perhaps worth reexamining.

On 19 April the United States braced for a busy and kinetic day, but despite the predictions of a massive

Iranian response, nothing happened. In fact, Iranian attacks completely ceased for nearly a month. A full twenty-percent of Iranian capability had been destroyed as well as fifty-percent of its most effective Saam-class Frigates in a single day. The simultaneous advancement of Iraqi forces on al-Faw peninsula cannot be underestimated in analysis. Although U.S. documentation shows the two operations were merely a fortunate coincidence, the Iranian perception was that the U.S. Navy and the Iraqi ground forces each coordinated their respective attacks to coincide and deliver a massive strike against the Iranians.⁵³ Tehran assessed the harmonized offensives confirmed the United States was clearly working to defeat Iran, opposed to maintaining open shipping lanes as the mandate in the Gulf had been vocalized. This coordination played a great deal into Iranian calculation. The Iranians believed they were not simply resisting the Iraqi invader, but also the United States. This placed the regime against difficult odds indeed. The lack of an Iranian response in the month following Praying Mantis can be at least partially attributed to this strategic calculation. Iran's interests and abilities to endure suffering would once again be evaluated, as the Tanker War came to a climax a few months later.

On 3 July 1988, while in the midst of a scuffle with IRGC swarming small boats, the USS *Vincennes* misidentified a civilian aircraft; Iran Air flight 655, as an Iranian F-14. The details of the highly controversial incident are out of the scope of this paper, but the event resulted in a U.S. Navy warship shooting down a civilian airliner and killing all 290 passengers and crew aboard. Pragmatic people have pragmatic interpretations of events and although the U.S. led investigation claimed the shoot down was a tragic error, Iranian leadership claimed the assault was done purposely. According to Iranian calculations the shooting was such a brutal step and incredible violation of international norms of behavior it scared the Iranians and drove Ayatollah Khomeini to drink from the "poison chalice" by accepting UN Resolution 598.⁵⁴ Although the true reason for the acceptance of the Resolution by Ayatollah Khomeini is officially unknown, it is likely the offensives of an Iraqi Army using chemical munitions and bombing cities combined with the United States willing to shoot down civilian airplanes deemed an existential threat to the regime. Regardless of the reasons, thirteen days following the shoot down of Iran Air flight 655 a cease-fire was accepted, and on 20 August peace broke out in the Persian Gulf.

Lessons from the Tanker War

What are the lessons of the Tanker War? The year-long naval engagement occurring between the initial Earnest Will convoy on 21 July 1987 and the shooting down of Iran Air in July of 1988 provides some good insights how Iran fights and reacts to U.S. operations. It must of course be understood that U.S. actions are interpreted by the Iranians in a way that we have little control over, as the narrative will be shaped by the regime in Tehran. The Iranians rejected the escort operations from the beginning and challenged the U.S. Navy immediately upon commencing the convoy operations when the tanker *Bridgeton* struck a mine on 24 July 1987. The reluctance by the Americans to respond invited more aggressive behavior until the Iran Ajr incident where the U.S. engaged and destroyed Iranian mine-laying capabilities. Instead of completely halting attacks the IRGC simply shifted tactics in constant search of gaps in the American posture. Iran first had two failed attacks on the Saudi mainland, and then fired Silkworm missiles at Kuwait. As attacking U.S. allies in the Gulf failed to draw a strong American response; Tehran once again escalated by striking the USS *Roberts* with a mine. Operation Praying Mantis followed and was the only time the IRGC Navy bore a large brunt of U.S. naval Power. The wildcard in analysis is the use of Silkworm missiles against U.S. warships. Faced with dual offensives from the Iraqi Army on al-Faw and the large naval battle in the Gulf, the Iranians played their hand and disputably launched the most powerful weapon in the inventory. A clear signal as to how desperate the situation was being viewed from Tehran. The shoot down of Iran Air 655 in July 1988 combined with improved Iraqi technologies, the use of chemical munitions, an economy in shambles and a weakening of support for the regime forced the Ayatollah Khomeini to finally capitulate. In

a sense of tit for tat, failing to respond boldly to initial Iranian aggressiveness simply asked for more problems. Although American attacks were met with harsh rhetoric, temporary inaction actually ensued. Following tactical setbacks, the IRGC leadership investigated and sought other opportunities to strike the Americans, which eventually happened. This displays a mature and pragmatic self-evaluation process unlikely to repeat or reinforce tactical failures. Operation Praying Mantis was an escalation that significantly threatened the Iranian Navy. Even following the large loss that Iran suffered on 18 April, following a temporary pause in activities, small boat attacks did actually continue until the cease fire was officially implemented in August.

The Next Phase

1989 introduced a new era for not only the world, but also U.S.-Iran relations. President George H.W. Bush followed President Reagan, Ayatollah Khomeini passed away in June, the pragmatic Ali Akbar Rafsanjani became President of Iran, and the Soviet Union pulled its troops out of Afghanistan. The disputes between the U.S. and Iran went into relative dormancy in relation to the past decade despite persistence of certain issues, such as remaining American hostages in Lebanon. Despite certain differences between the countries, it seems the tit for tat nature of the relationship began to moderate. The shock waves both sides felt from international events of the time provided limited maneuverability for a reset in relations.

President Bush began his period in office with a conciliatory message of “goodwill begets goodwill,” meaning that in exchange for Iranian assistance in freeing American hostages held in Lebanon, the United States would be willing to soften its stance, and reconsider sanctions against the regime.⁵⁵ Iran was proportionally muted if not slightly supportive regarding the U.S. liberation of Kuwait and American hostages were finally released from Lebanon in December of 1991. There was no reciprocal act of goodwill from the Americans however. Iranian support for terrorism and spoiling efforts in the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process justified the lack of goodwill from the Americans side.⁵⁶ In what was perceived as diplomatic slights, the tit for tat would emerge again, but in a less visible manner.

The Gulf War in January of 1991 was a shot across the Iranian bow making clear that conventionally competing with the United States on land or at sea was not an option. Consequently, the next decade of conflict was played out via proxies using asymmetric tactics to achieve strategic objectives. Tehran was certainly hesitant to confront the U.S. force on force, but adept at finding gaps and seams in American policies as well as defenses. Iran shifted tactics, adopting techniques the military felt it could be most successful at conducting; proxy War, subversive acts, and terrorism. These policies redefined and renewed exchanges between the two countries.

The relationship for the remainder of the decade can best be described as strategic level movements by the United States, countered by proxy and asymmetry by the Iranians. The tit for tat was played out at high levels and in a sense the goodwill stated by President Bush in 1990, did receive a certain degree of goodwill from the pragmatic Rafsanjani, who had his own hardliner elements to contend with domestically.⁵⁷ During the Clinton administration, Iranian President Rafsanjani made some significant steps to initiate an improvement in relations between the two countries. Rafsanjani offered Conoco gas company access to the Iranian natural energy sector in 1996, a deal which was rejected by anti-Iran hawks in Congress. Pragmatic outreach was further restrained by IRGC Qods Force assassinations in Europe and bombings in Argentina. Such attacks lead to increased economic sanctions by the Clinton Administration in 1995.⁵⁸ Simultaneously Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Newt Gingrich announced an increased eighteen-million dollar investment in covert activities to undermine the regime in Iran. The affront of rebuking on the oil deal while announcing an increase in funding to undermine the Iranian regime was viewed as a direct threat

to Tehran.⁵⁹ The steps lead to a shift in Iranian policy and return to aggressive activities.

Iran first responded much as they did in the Tanker War nine years earlier, by attacking U.S. allies in the region. An Iranian trained Shia group in Bahrain was arrested in the summer of 1996 for planning to assassinate the Emir of that country and on 25 June 1996 a truck bomb exploded near a U.S. Air Force dormitory at Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia, killing nineteen American service men and women, while wounding 372. The terrorist attack was blamed on Hezbollah but received support and final approval from the Supreme Leader via the IRGC.⁶⁰ The response from the Clinton Administration was minimal, limited to spy games in third countries. The U.S. again, with its eyes on the prize of attempting to normalize relations failed to respond to a terrorist attack. In this exceptional case however, it might have done some good as moderate forces swept into power in Iran.

May of 1997 marked the arrival of the new Iranian President Mohammad Khatami and his “dialogue of the civilizations” proposal.⁶¹ Under the tempered leader the U.S. hoped tensions between the two nations would de-escalate and eventually normalize. The relationship moderated over the next four years with significant outreach taken. Then Secretary of State Madeline Albright went as far as any American leader ever has in stating a near apology to Iran for the U.S. role in the overthrowing of Mohammad Mosaddeq back in 1953, and President Clinton made overly conciliatory messages as his term came near an end in the hope of a diplomatic breakthrough.⁶²

Lessons of the 1990's

The decade of the 1990's was tame in comparison to the heightened tensions of the 80's, with a relatively small number of altercations. Although engagements were limited, tit for tat continued, and contrary to the decade prior were disagreements and conflict occurred at the tactical as well as the strategic level, the 90's operated purely in the strategic realm. Diplomacy and proxies replaced naval altercations attacking the interests of the opponent. Goodwill attempts in the early portion of the decade never materialized. Some scholars claim many parts of this decade as a lost opportunity for either side at rapprochement.⁶³ Although the belief does indeed hold merit, it ignores the overlying interests of both countries. The United States in the 1990's was the sole global superpower unchallenged by any other actor in the system. Although terrorism was an issue, it never escalated to the point it would in the following decade. The United States did not see any reason to limit sanctions on Iran due to Iranian lack of support for the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process, and its terror activities abroad. The goodwill of getting American hostages released in Lebanon was not reciprocal. When the U.S. rejected an economic overture from Rafsanjani and announced increases in covert funding to overthrow the regime, Tehran reacted violently by attacking U.S. personnel at Khobar Towers. The U.S. never responded to this atrocity in kind, which in retrospect may have been a good decision. The key lesson learned of the decade is that despite outreach by the Clinton Administration towards the end of his term, Iran did not and could not moderate its aggressive stance immediately. Iran not only wants the U.S. as an outside villain, but *needs* the U.S. to be a hawkish adversary. Henry Kissinger stated that Iran must decide if it is a cause or a nation.⁶⁴ An aggressive United States justifies the revolution and indeed the existence of the Islamic Republic, therefore reinforcing the cause. Iran, for its own interest will behave in a tit for tat manner until striking the United States becomes too painful to endure, which at that time, will cease belligerent activity until Tehran identifies another angle to strike. This cycle has continued since 1979 and is the basis for the tit for tat analysis.

A New Century: Same Result

George W. Bush's 2001 arrival in the Oval Office maintained the positive narrative regarding Iran. Despite

the outgoing policy of his father's administration in 1992 which saw Iran as "impervious to gestures of kindness and unlikely to succumb to moderating influences," and concluded that "Iran's strategy remained fixed on driving the U.S. out of the Gulf, expanding their influence throughout the region, and derailing the peace process."⁶⁵ Eight years following the perspective from the elder President Bush, necessity compelled pragmatic policy discussions. Debate during the initial months of the Bush Administration considered policy changes, which involved the "relaxation of sanctions, acceptance of an Iranian civilian atomic program and the adoption of phased engagement."⁶⁶ These softening approaches of course came on the heels of the Clinton Administration's policies which did not respond kinetically to the Khobar Towers attack, Secretary of State Madeline Albright's considerably conciliatory statement and other normalizing steps towards the end of Clinton's presidency.⁶⁷ Tit for tat was occurring. The moderate approach met moderating responses, and Iran had some domestic flexibility to placate on U.S. demands. The attacks of 11 September 2001 and the pragmatic response from Tehran continued the cooling trend in rhetoric and action between the two nations. Mutual interests reigned as Iranians assisted the United States in Afghanistan and initially at least, in Iraq.⁶⁸ The immediate months following the 9/11 attacks provided glimmers of rapprochement possibilities between Washington and Tehran. The terrorist attacks, for better or worse, changed the entire debate surrounding foreign policy in Washington however. The "with us or against us" paradigm embraced by the Bush Administration echoed policies of a prior generation when all decisions were made within the context of a bipolar world with the Soviet Union. Now all solutions would be considered in the context of the Global War on Terror. The first decade of the 21st century began with a small window of opportunity for the tit for tat relationship to produce conciliatory policies. However political realities, promotion of an idealized grand strategy vice nuanced arrangements, and colliding interests once again resulted in continued stalemate and harsh rhetoric.

The U.S. Invades Afghanistan

Shortly following the attacks of 9/11 small teams began to flow into northern Afghanistan in order to organize, support, and augment the resistance to the Taliban and drive the Pashtun dominated government from Kabul. After years of U.S. softening narratives, Iran assisted the American effort in Afghanistan. Following overt symbols of sympathy with the American people following 9/11, Tehran offered concrete assistance to the U.S. effort to unseat the Taliban and establish a new government in Afghanistan.⁶⁹ According to Mohsen Milani, "Iranian military advisors rubbed shoulders with U.S. military personnel in the Northern Alliance areas," as both governments supported the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance forces. Milani further adds that "Tehran even said it would give sanctuary for distressed U.S. military personnel inside its territory," and "also allowed the United States to transport humanitarian goods to Afghanistan through Iranian land [the port at Chah Bahar]. Iran reportedly suggested the best targets for U.S. bombers."⁷⁰ There was also substantial diplomatic assistance in creating a stable government in Kabul. In December of 2001, the Bonn Conference selected Hamid Karzai as the leader of the new government. The Iranians helped convince the opposition to support Karzai, a difficult feat, and also insisted on democratic elections.⁷¹ The cooperation in Afghanistan however, ended abruptly the next month.

The "Axis of Evil speech" given by President Bush on 29 January 2002 marked a shift in Iranian assistance to the U.S. effort in Afghanistan. The accusatory and threatening tone from the American President during his annual State of the Union address drew harsh criticism from Tehran and in response, the Iranians stopped attending peace talks in Geneva.⁷² Although the speech is used to justify Iranian intransigence, it is not clear the speech itself directly caused the Iranian change of behavior. A pragmatic analysis of U.S. intentions by the Iranians likely concluded that a policy opposing the United States was needed to slow down the emerging existential threat. The Iranians may have seen themselves as soon to be the next target of the United States and decided to resist through asymmetric means. Regardless, if one believes the argument

that the Iranians slowed support for the U.S. in Afghanistan as a response to the offending State of the Union address, or out of pure pragmatic interests, most agree the speech marked a certain shift in the Iranian approach towards the Americans following 9/11.

The U.S. Invades Iraq

Following the quick fall of the Taliban, seeming invincibility of the United States military, and impending attack on Saddam Hussein, the Iranian government explored opportunities to once again involve themselves in U.S. decision making. Axis of Evil or not, the Iranians wanted to reopen talks with Washington as the drums of war with Iraq grew louder.⁷³

A heated debate occurred in Washington surrounding what the Iranian response to a U.S. attack on Saddam Hussein's Iraq would be. Although no official planning team existed, deliberation swirled with experts weighing in on both sides regarding Iran's potential reaction. Iranian diplomats proposed mutual cooperation to the White House to overthrow Saddam Hussein. The Iranian proposition stated that in "return for Iran's assistance, Washington would publically advocate for normalized relations."⁷⁴ An offer the White House demurred, instead rationalizing that following a swift and victorious assault into Baghdad, Tehran would feel threatened thereby motivated to reconsider its policies of supporting terrorism, and developing nuclear weapons.⁷⁵ In the end, according to the logic, the United States would get the behavior it wanted, and would not compromise core interests by entering into negotiations with the Iranians.

The second diplomatic snub in less than twelve months certainly changed the equation in Tehran. Opposed to viewing the assault as the removal of the hated Saddam Hussein, the narrative grew that it was simply a warm-up for regime change in Tehran. The hawks in Iran gained the upper-hand vis-à-vis the reformist camp and the IRGC was directed to begin planning a resistance to the U.S. occupation in Iraq, while setting the stage for an Iran-friendly regime in Baghdad.⁷⁶

In the spring of 2003 U.S. forces swept north from Kuwait capturing Baghdad in less than three weeks. The speed and effectiveness of the operation quickly put the Iranians in a dilemma. American military forces surrounded Iran while an emboldened hawkish U.S. regime published rhetoric discussing a regime change agenda, potentially using military force.⁷⁷ Iran's response was twofold. First, the beginning phases of a plan to undermine the U.S. effort by creating proxy forces amongst the disenfranchised Shia went into effect. Simultaneously, a disputed final attempt at normalization of the long contentious relationship took place shortly following the fall of Baghdad.

The Guldemann Memo

The Swiss Embassy in Tehran maintains an interests section for the United States and Iran and has done so since shortly after the Revolution. It serves as the representative for U.S. interests in Iran, but its functions are primarily administrative. In early May of 2003 a letter arrived at the U.S. Department of State via the Swiss Ambassador in Tehran. The letter claimed the Supreme Leader was prepared to negotiate on all issues and laid out requirements that would enable Iran to go forward with rapprochement while also addressing American concerns. The letter, referred to as "The Guldemann Memo," after Swiss Ambassador Tim Guldemann, has since sparked a significant and important debate. One side argues the Bush administration in all its hubris and fervor of post-invasion success lost the opportunity to negotiate with Tehran on all issues from a position of significant strength. This argument claims that after seeing the Taliban fall so quickly, and more importantly, U.S. troops in Baghdad weeks after the invasion began, Iran was compelled to negotiate on American demands.⁷⁸

A second argument and the one ultimately adopted by the Bush Administration claims the memo was not even authentic. An over-zealous Swiss diplomat serving out his last days in Tehran created the memo in a last ditch effort; either to achieve a final peace, or to solidify his own legacy. The administration believed Guldumann created the letter via dialogue with non-influential Iranians to get peace talks moving.⁷⁹

Regardless which argument one believes, the Bush Administration did not deem the cable authentic and ignored it. This was the third diplomatic slight in two years and was likely interpreted in Tehran that the U.S. would quickly be setting their sights on regime change in the Islamic Republic as some American pundits were advocating for.⁸⁰ Barbara Slavin claimed “the overture was never seriously considered by the Bush Administration, then in a triumphalist mood over Iraq.”⁸¹ This slight opened the gates for Qods Force activities in Iraq, which would take years for the Americans to effectively counter.

An additional question within the context of events of the Guldumann Memo; accepting it was indeed authentic and endorsed by legitimate decision makers in Tehran, is if the letter was merely a delaying tactic? At the very moment the cable was being delivered, IRGC-Qods forces officers were flowing money and arms into the Shia areas of Iraq. The Iranian plan for the Lebanonization of Iraqi Shia to resist the Americans began as early as September of 2002, even before the invasion took place.⁸² The interfering Iranian strategy was clear to U.S. officials by 1 May 2003, prior to receipt of the memo. At this time the U.S. administration believed at least fifty Qods Force officers were organizing targeted Shia groups into proxy forces set to do Iran’s bidding at a later date.⁸³ The firebrand Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr visited Iran in May of 2003, and slightly over a year later, Qods Force operators were advising the fighters of the Mahdi Army confronting U.S. Marines in Najaf.⁸⁴ Parallel to ongoing diplomatic talks, the Iranians were also preparing a post-Saddam force that would serve the interests of Tehran. The two-faced policies made perfect sense from Iran’s perspective. On one hand prepare to destabilize the American efforts while creating a friendly environment for future activities in Iraq and simultaneously, maintain open dialogue to perhaps shape and influence decision making in Washington.

In the years following the Iraq invasion, the Bush Administration continued to publicize threatening rhetoric and U.S. Congress ultimately passed the Iran Freedom Support Act which provided increased funding for promotion of democracy and U.S. broadcasting in Iran.⁸⁵ In response, Iran maintained and even increased its support for proxies in Iraq. This was of course no surprise to those at Department of Defense or anyone else involved with the war. Officials on numerous occasions presented evidence of Iran providing arms, munitions, training, and direction to Shia militias. Iranian made Explosively Formed Projectiles (EFP’s) smuggled into southern Iraq killed 140 coalition troops in 2006 alone.⁸⁶ In 2007, Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Michael Mullen revealed that Iran’s Qods Force were coordinating throughout southern and eastern Iraq with insurgents, providing arms, training, and financing. The higher-level tactical instruction took place in Iran. To better streamline and coordinate training and operations the Ramazan Corps was reinforced and maintained geographical areas of responsibility. Iranian backed militias were not only a threat to U.S. forces, but began to challenge the legitimacy of the new Iraqi government as well.⁸⁷

By late 2006, the United States had had enough of Iranian munitions killing American soldiers in Iraq and decided to take action. A series of special operations raids on known Qods Force and other Iran related facilities led to the detention of numerous high-ranking officers and netted droves of intelligence further implicating the Iranians in conducting belligerent activities.⁸⁸ The actions slowed Iranian operations as high level Qods Force officers began to get rolled up, but Iranian interference never completely ceased.⁸⁹ Shia groups continued to gain influence throughout the south of the country and Sunnis were ethnically cleansed out of mixed neighborhoods in Baghdad. In the latter half of 2007, U.S. surge forces were primarily

occupied with chasing Shia militia fighters trained and supported by Iran. Despite overwhelming evidence, a claim that Tehran continued to deny.⁹⁰ Finally in March of 2008, Iraqi President Nouri al-Maliki sent forces to the southern port city of Basra to confront and defeat Iranian backed Shia militias that had over taken the city. It was not until this, Iraqi-led and U.S. enabled offensive took place that the Iranian activities slowed, forcing Tehran to recommit to soft power and providing assistance in stabilizing in Iraq.⁹¹ The backlash from Maliki and the leadership in Baghdad threatened Iranian interests in Iraq, which relied heavily on popular support from the Shia population. The Iranian interference, as it became increasingly publicized, was leading to a new narrative, where opposed to the coalition, Iranian backed militias were being blamed by the Iraqi people for the increasing levels of violence and instability.⁹² This new narrative, combined with military and diplomatic pressure convinced the Iranians to slow their kinetic activities, albeit temporarily.

Analyzing the post 9/11 era

Tit for tat defined the first decade of the 21st Century between the adversarial nations. Diplomatic maneuvers, public statements, policy speeches, proxies conducting irregular activities, special operation raids, and nuclear negotiations all contributed to the relationship. The full spectrum witnessed displays of how adept either side has become at countering the other.

The end of the Clinton presidency coincided with Iranian moderate president Mohammad Khatami's administration. Consequently, the aggression of the past became slightly tempered and following the attacks on 9/11, both sides justified cooperation in the name of mutual interests. Iran responded to the crisis by providing support to the American efforts in Afghanistan. This assistance however, was countered by the antagonistic "Axis of Evil" speech, which marked an ending in Tehran's cooperation in Afghanistan. Roughly ten months later, in September of 2002, the Iranians once again reached out diplomatically to the Americans as the debate surrounding an attack into Iraq became more heated, but it was too late. By that time, Iran was firmly placed amongst a grouping of countries supporting terrorism. Indeed Iran maintained support for both Hamas and Hezbollah, and was believed to be pursuing a nuclear weapons program. For these two reasons, the Bush Administration was unwilling to yield in the declared "Freedom Agenda."⁹³ For a second time, the tit for tat cycle was broken and Iranian outreach was rebuffed. The timing of this failed outreach coincides with the earliest reported period of Iranian irregulars beginning to strengthen networks and prepare Iraqi Shia for a future American occupation. Following the attack into Iraq and the quick capture of Baghdad, the Guldemann memo was delivered to the U.S. Department of State. Although the authenticity of the letter is debated, this was potentially a third diplomatic outreach in two years. The memo was ignored, and the IRGC-Qods Force operations in Iraq expanded and intensified. Shia militias supported by Iran intensified attacks on the American occupiers, threatened the legitimacy of the undeveloped Iraqi government, and openly challenged and infiltrated the immature Iraqi security forces. After years of fumbling, 2007 marked the year that U.S. Special Operations units began to target Iranian facilitation nodes operating in Iraq. There was even debate considering strikes into Iran in order to send a message to Tehran to cease interference. The combination of the special operation raids targeting Iranian leadership, an Iraqi led offensive into the Iranian proxy heartland of Basra, and an assault into northern Sadr City finally forced the Iranians to slow operations in Iraq. This was in fact a repeat of the 1987 incident discussed above when the IRGC mined international waters and struck neutral shipping outside of the Gulf. That blunder gave the appearance Iran was a menace and a clear aggressor. It motivated European nations to send mine sweeping equipment to the Gulf and isolated Tehran. Twenty years later the same story played itself out. Iran over played its hand, was about to get hurt diplomatically by losing the support of the Iraqi Shia community and tactically by attracting the unwanted attention of U.S. Special Operations. Again, the strength of force, combined with the threat of diplomatic catastrophe tempered Iranian actions.

In addition to a tit for tat assessment of U.S.-Iranian exchanges, an evaluation of the deftness of the Iranians to operate in the gray areas warrants credit. Iranian resistance via proxy abated the Americans leaving space to pursue Iranian interests, but never antagonistic enough to draw a full-scale response. Although backing an insurgency in Iraq, the Supreme Leader wisely respected the power of the U.S. military. Understanding the U.S. was mostly concerned about nuclear weapons and support to al-Qaeda, Iran appeased and “in the fall 2003, Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program.”⁹⁴ Iran also made strong statements denying support or any official connections to al-Qaeda.⁹⁵ Simultaneously, Iran began sending fighters to establish a proxy force fighting in the interests of Iran. Once the Iranian efforts at diplomacy and negotiation failed, the tit for tat relationship continued at the tactical level. The lessons of the Tanker War, and the mistakes made during the Reagan Administration had to be relearned to relieve pressure on American forces. Unfortunately it took nearly three years and hundreds of lives for this to occur. One incident narrated by David Crist took place in the spring of 2003 in the Shatt al-Arab provides insight: It depicts a U.S. Navy SEAL unit ordered to back down from an aggressive IRGC naval patrol operating in neutral waters. No response came at a later date.⁹⁶ This and similar incidents in these tit for tat engagements display weakness, and result in Iranian escalation. The Americans waited years for a measured answer that would force the Iranians to rethink hostilities. The lesson from Iranian interference in the Iraq War is the same as it was in the Tanker War; policy cannot strive to placate the Iranians so they stop a certain behavior. The question must be how to reciprocate to Iranian hostile behavior making it so painful, that the negatives of their actions outweigh the positives.

The Saga Continues

In January of 2009 newly elected U.S. President Barack Obama extended a “velvet glove” and spoke directly to the Iranian government in his New Year’s message. President Obama on two occasions spoke directly to Iran’s leadership and additionally stated: “The United States wants the Islamic Republic of Iran to take its rightful place in the community of nations.”⁹⁷ Accompanying the friendly rhetoric were some ideas for compromise on the nuclear issue.⁹⁸ For once, it was an expert move on behalf of an American administration vis-à-vis the Islamic Republic. The statement, along with others from the White House in 2009 and 2010 gave the impression to the international community the United States rejected the hawkish behaviors of the past and was ready for a reset in relations with not only Tehran, but the Middle East writ large. The peace overtures were rescinded following the brutal crackdown on Green Movement protestors in the summer of 2009 on the streets of Tehran.⁹⁹ The Obama Administration conducted the proper analysis and determined the regimes critical vulnerability laid not inside of Iran, nor in Washington, but at the United Nations where economic sanctions are negotiated. The most recent strategic moves by the United States to intensify and increase sanctions has damaged the Iranian economy significantly, and isolated Tehran diplomatically.¹⁰⁰ A glimpse at the past thirty-three years indicates Iran will respond by attempting to delay the severity of sanctions, identify the gray area in the policy and resist American behavior without motivating a strong response.

Strategic level negotiations surrounding the Iranian nuclear program have come to the fore in recent years. Missile launches and military exercises carried out by both sides in the vicinity of the Straits of Hormuz are clear messages of the existing brinkmanship. Additionally, public statements of potential openings between the two nations have come and gone. Both sides, for various reasons, have been unable to respond sufficiently to the others diplomatic overtures. The United States continues to push for an increasing and severing of sanctions, while Iran attempts to delay, and respond to these measures. Assassinations and computer viruses mysteriously target the Iranian nuclear program. Over the past four years, sanctions have been continuously strengthened by the Obama Administration. Iran’s response thus far has been a lot of rhetoric and bluster

combined with some incredibly amateurish assassination attempts in Bulgaria, Georgia, Washington D.C., New Delhi, and Bangkok.¹⁰¹ Despite this, the nuclear program continues to develop.¹⁰² If a stronger, more effective response will follow is still to be determined.

Conclusion

Carrot and Stick vs. Tit for Tat: The carrot and stick approach does not prove to be effective, as goodwill does not always invite goodwill, simply because goodwill is ill defined and not always in the best interest of either nation. However, the tit for tat model provides a lucid reflection of the past thirty-three years. More importantly it provides a model and pattern for assessing future behaviors and decisions made in Tehran. At this point antagonism is near certain to occur between the two nation-states, it is measured and proper responses that will determine whether future disagreements will be solved in the diplomatic or kinetic realm.

Beginning with the hostage taking at the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, and continuing today as sanctions increasingly strangle the Iranian economy, the tit for tat model endures. The lessons learned are numerous but perhaps the most telling and dramatic incident provides ultimate insight into Iranian decision-making and priorities. The Iranian nation was horrified and shocked the moment Iran Air 655 fell out of the sky killing the 290 civilian passengers aboard. Then speaker of the parliament Hashemi Rafsanjani claimed the shooting down of a civilian airliner was a “turning point” in Tehran’s calculations showing the United States was prepared to conduct “immense crimes” to stop Iran from achieving its objectives.¹⁰³ Within weeks, Iran signed the UN brokered cease-fire agreement ending the Iran-Iraq war after eight long and bloody years. Although the incident was indeed a tragic mistake, few in Iran actually believed the shoot down was accidental. The reaction of the Iranians to finally end the fighting only occurred following the disaster. In Iranian calculations the atrocity was an indication of the lengths Washington was willing to go to defeat the Islamic Republic. The fighting up until that point was made to change the behavior of the Iranians. Shooting down airliners is a precursor to destroying the regime. Clearly, the attack foreshadowed an existential threat.

What are the lessons learned? This monograph attempts to show that to force a change, a reciprocal answer countering both positive and negative behaviors is required. The Islamic Republic has historically backed down in the face of overwhelming threats, and the past displays instances of Iran succumbing at all levels of pressure, from tactical to strategic. First, at the tactical level the seizure of oilrigs in the Gulf, and the arrest of Qods Force agents in Baghdad forced a shift in policy. At the operational level when the U.S. Navy delivered a one-day wake up call to the IRGC Navy as part of Operation Praying Mantis Iranian mine-laying policies changed. The results of tit for tat are most obvious at the strategic level, i.e.: the signing of the UN Resolution in 1988 when facing an increasingly hostile U.S. Navy in the Persian Gulf and Iraqi advancements on al-Faw Peninsula; the moderate rhetoric from the Iranians following both the first and second Gulf Wars; President Khatami’s cooperative stances following Clinton era equanimity; and Tehran reaffirming its commitment to assisting the government in Iraq after Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki surged forces into Basra. All of these examples illustrate that reciprocation is a valuable tool that ultimately begets positive and predictable results.

Contrary to the hard-fisted approach outlined above, when the U.S. has displayed weakness, it has paid dearly. President Jimmy Carter’s hesitation during the hostage crisis merely extended the ordeal and solidified the legitimacy of the revolution. The failure to reciprocate to the bombing of the Marine barracks in Lebanon simply invited more Iranian interference in that country’s civil war. Negotiations for hostages

in Lebanon promoted more hostage taking. More recently, the long and clumsy delay in responding to Qods Force attacks in Iraq allowed subversive activities to grow stronger. The only exception is the constraint used following the Khobar Towers attack. As a rule of thumb however, when the U.S. failed to adhere to tit for tat, it has lost.

Ultimately, the Iranians are not very much interested in our carrots and not paying much attention to our sticks until they threaten an issue the regime views as a priority. We must remember the words of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1988: “Dear God, witness that we do not reconcile ourselves to either the American or Soviet governments, and that we regard friendly relations with these superpowers and other great powers in this world to be contrary to the fundamental principles of our Islamic faith.”¹⁰⁴ Considering this core belief that, according to Ayatollah Khomeini, the foundational principles of Islam reject friendly relations with the United States, it is difficult to imagine Iran doing anything we want them to do, unless they are forced into doing it.

What does this tell us as we try to go forward attempting to make the proper decisions strategically, operationally and tactically vis-à-vis Iran? The question commanders and intelligence professionals must constantly strive to answer is what do the Iranians want? What are the priorities of the Islamic Republic? Which of these priorities oppose American interests? How do we make achieving the identified conflicting priorities more painful than it is worth? How does Iran define existential and priority threats, understanding they can be economic, political, psychological, military or a combination of all?

The final discussion point will be about the potential Iranian nuclear weapons program. Although a full analysis of the ongoing negotiations is beyond this monograph it is worth mentioning the historical context these nuclear negotiations occur in. If Iran believes a nuclear energy program is a fundamental right and the regime is willing to accept economic sanctions, than the United States must be willing to escalate sanctions and maintain the threat of military force in order to stop the program, which is believed to be for military purposes. The precedence outlined above shows the United States must be willing to present an existential threat to the Iranian regime if Tehran decides to continue its pursuit of the program. It is likely an effective threat exists somewhere in between current sanctions and military invasion. Where that point is exactly is still unknown.

The Iranians are a savvy, pragmatic, adaptable foe, and history proves Tehran as adept at finding loopholes and gray areas in U.S. policies constantly striving to achieve its own objectives while not drawing too fierce of a response. Despite short-term victories, a pragmatic look at geopolitics indicates Iran has fallen considerably in the past thirty-three years compared to its pre-Revolution international standing. Currently, Iran is internationally isolated, under severe and broadening sanctions, viewed as diplomatically irresponsible, shunned in many parts of the world, economically pressured, has a decreasing level of exports, faces rising inflation of its currency, and is surrounded militarily. The United States has a massive military presence in the Persian Gulf, and every bellicose statement emitting from someone in Tehran simply justifies more military aid to Iran’s foes, and more diplomatic pressure from the international community. In many ways the regime is being choked, and weakened every day. It is not altruistic policies that got us to this point; in fact there is no place for altruism in such a relationship. Carrots and Sticks need not apply. The United States increases pressure by gaining an advantage in each small tit for tat exchange that has defined the Iran–U.S. dynamic since the inception of the Islamic Republic.

Notes:

¹ David Crist, *The Twilight War: The Secret History of America's Thirty-Year Conflict with Iran* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012).

² Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Basic Books, 1984) 40.

³ Ibid. 54.

⁴ Ibid, 27-54.

⁵ Peter Munson, *War, Welfare, and Democracy: Rethinking America's Quest for the End of History* (Washington: Potomac Books, 2013), 89.

⁶ Michael Howard and Peter Paret, trans., *On War of Carl Von Clausewitz* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 80-81.

⁷ This is a very loose definition of Realism falling under other more complex over-arching explanations. The definition attempts to capture the spirit of Realism while maintaining its simplicity. See Kenneth Waltz, *Realism and International Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2008); and William Wohlforth, "Realism" in *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations*, ed. Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 131-147.

⁸ In August of 1953 the CIA orchestrated a military coup in Tehran to overthrow and arrest the Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddeq. This event was seen as the point in which the U.S. betrayed the Iranian people and fundamentally altered a government to solve the Iranian oil nationalization crisis in its own interest. It also is the backdrop for decades of mistrust for the United States by the Iranian people.

⁹ Ray Takeyh, *Hidden Iran: Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2006), 44.

¹⁰ James Blight et al., *Becoming Enemies: US-Iran Relations and the Iran-Iraq War 1979-1988* (Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield, 2012), 35-37; and Kenneth Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict Between Iran and America* (New York: Random House, 2004), 155.

¹¹ John Limbert, *Negotiating with Iran: Wrestling the Ghosts of History* (Washington: United States Institute of Peace, 2009), 103-107.

¹² Ibid, 114.

¹³ Blight et al., *Becoming Enemies*, 86; and Limbert, *Negotiating with Iran*, 115.

¹⁴ The 1975 Algiers Agreement, also referred to as the Algiers Accord, was an internationally recognized agreement between Iran and Iraq to settle border disputes over the Shatt al-Arab and Khuzestan.

¹⁵ Claudia Wright, "Implications of the Iraq-Iran War," *Foreign Affairs* 59:2 (Winter 1980), 278-279, <http://www.proquest.com/>.

¹⁶ "Iran Says U.N. Ignored War After Iraqis Attacked in 1980," *The New York Times*, Oct 13, 1982, <http://www.proquest.com/>.

¹⁷ Blight et al., *Becoming Enemies*, 63-69.

¹⁸ Ibid 63.

¹⁹ Phillip Taubman, "Iran, Iraq, and The U.S.; News Analysis," *The New York Times*, Jul 14, 1982, <http://www.proquest.com/>.

²⁰ Bernard Gwertzman, "Iraq Gets Reports from U.S. for Use in War with Iran," *The New York Times*, Dec 16, 1986, <http://www.proquest.com/>.

²¹ Crist, *Twilight War*, 122; and Robert Baer, *The Devil We Know: Dealing with the New Iranian Superpower* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2009), 64-65.

²² Baer, *The Devil We Know*, 64-65.

²³ Crist, *Twilight War*, 134.

²⁴ Ibid, 134.

²⁵ Terry Anderson, *Den of Lions: Memoirs of Seven Years* (New York: Balantine Books, 1993), 54.

²⁶ Susan Kerr Van de Ven, *One Family's Response to Terrorism: A Daughter's Memoir* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 66-67.

²⁷ Blight et al., *Becoming Enemies*, 137.

²⁸ Crist, *Twilight War*, 186-202. Crist provides numerous examples of how debate in the White House did include discussion around moderate elements in the Iranian regime and the desire to strengthen their hand in domestic dealings vis-à-vis the extreme wings of those ruling in Tehran, while also setting the foundation for improved relations. Former CIA member Thomas Twetten, an intimate participant in the dealings claims that "the first, last, and only objective of Reagan himself was to free the hostages."

²⁹ The TOW anti-tank missile was vital in Iran being able to stop Iraqi tanks. It was likely the most needed weapon in the arsenal to defeat the Iraqi Army.

³⁰ Karim Sadjapour, "The Prince of Persia: Machiavelli's got nothing on Iran's Supreme Leader," *Foreign Policy Online*, July 21, 2011. The idea that Iran's leadership is able to deflect responsibility of any wrong doings has been a mainstay of the regime since inception. This article cited compares Machiavellian policies and the behaviors of the Supreme Leader today, I would include that this behavior goes back to the Revolution in 1979 and the IRGC-Hezbollah relationship is a prime example of this.

³¹ Anthony Cordesman and Adam Seitz, *Iranian Weapons of Mass Destruction: The Birth of a Regional Nuclear Arms Race?* (Santa Barbara: Praeger Security International, 2009), 76. The Qods Force is a special arm of the IRGC that carries out unconventional warfare outside of Iran primarily using foreign proxies.

³² Carol Saivetz, *The Soviet Union and the Gulf in the 1980's* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989), 29; and Adam Tarock, *The Superpowers Involvement in the Iran-Iraq War* (Commack: Nova Science Publishers, 1998), 144.

³³ Adam Tarock, *The Superpowers Involvement in the Iran-Iraq War*, 144.

³⁴ "A Soviet Show of Force in Iran," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 6, 1987, 6.

³⁵ Lee Allen Zatarain, *America's First Clash with Iran, The Tanker War 1987-1988* (Havertown: Casemate Publishers, 2008), 66.

³⁶ P.E. Tyler, "U.S.-Protected Kuwaiti Tankers Reach Halfway Point; Iran Declares Cargo 'Prohibited goods,'" *The Washington Post*, Jul 24, 1987, <http://www.proquest.com/>.

³⁷ David Crist, "Gulf of Conflict: 'A History of U.S.-Iranian Conflict at Sea,'" *Policy Focus #95* (Washington: The Washington Institute for Near East Studies, June 2009), 10.

³⁸ "Reflagged Tanker Crippled by Mine, no U.S. Response, no Injuries, Ship Limp to Safe Port," *The Los Angeles Times*, July 24, 1987, <http://www.proquest.com/>.

³⁹ Lou Cannon, "White House Vows to Continue Gulf Escorts," *The Washington Post*, <http://www.proquest.com/>.

⁴⁰ Loren Jenkins, "Iran Concluded Naval Exercises; Tehran Reports Antiship Missile Test, Practice Ramming by Boats," *The Washington Post*, Aug 8, 1987, A-13.

⁴¹ Crist, *Twilight War*, 293.

⁴² Russell Watson and Jahon Barry, "A U.S. Ambush in the Gulf," *Newsweek*, Oct 5, 1987, 24.

⁴³ Zatarain, *America's First Clash with Iran*, 121-124.

⁴⁴ The Iranian Boghammer is an Iranian patrol boat modified with weapons systems allowing it to conduct attacks.

⁴⁵ Crist, *Twilight War*, 308-310.

⁴⁶ John Kifner, "U.S. Flag Tanker Struck by Missile in Kuwaiti Waters; First Direct Raid," *The New York Times*, Oct 17, 1987, <http://www.proquest.com/>.

⁴⁷ Zatarian, *America's First Clash with Iran*, 169.

⁴⁸ Crist, *Twilight War*, 356.

⁴⁹ Peter Grier, "If Iran fired Silkworms, will US Feel Need to escalate?" *The Christian Science Monitor*, April 20, 1988; and Norman Black, "Iran did not use Silkworm Missiles Against US Ships, Sources Say," *Associated Press*, April 27 1988; and Crist, "Gulf of Conflict," 10.

⁵⁰ Grier. "If Iran fired Silkworms."

⁵¹ Zatarian, *America's First Clash with Iran*, 261-289. In this chapter the author uses multiple interviews with crew members of the two ships in question, he also looks at the trajectory of the rounds. In his book *The Twilight War* David Crist uses official Pentagon reporting.

⁵² Crist, *Twilight War*, 352; and author interview with David Crist, November 20, 2012.

⁵³ Blight et al., *Becoming Enemies*, 9 and 161-163.

⁵⁴ Ibid, *Becoming Enemies*, 345-347. Quoted text from a transcript of Ayatollah Khomeini, "Letter to the Iranian People Regarding the End of the War." July 16, 1988.

⁵⁵ Richard Haas, "The George H.W. Bush Administration," in *The Iran Primer: Power, Politics, and U.S. Policy* (Washington: United States Institute of Peace, 2010), 137.

⁵⁶ Giandomenico Picco, *Man without a Gun: One Diplomat's Secret Struggle to Free the Hostages, Fight Terrorism, and End a War* (New York: Times Books, 1999), 3-7.

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⁵⁸ President Bill Clinton, "Executive Order 12959, Trade and Investment Ban, May 6, 1995," in *U.S.-Iranian Relations: An Analytic Compendium of U.S. Policies, Laws and Regulations* (Washington: Atlantic Council, February 2010), 97-98.

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⁶⁰ "Federal Grand Jury Indicts 14 in 1996 Khobar Towers Bombing," *NPR's All Things Considered*, Jun 21, 2001, <http://www.proquest.com/>.

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⁶² Donette Murray, *U.S. Foreign Policy and Iran: American-Iranian Relations since the Islamic Revolution* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 114-115.

⁶³ Barbara Slavin, "U.S.-Iran Relations: Catalog of Missed Opportunities." (Paper prepared for the American Foreign Policy Project, June 12, 2008), <http://americanforeignpolicy.org/>; and John Limbert, "America and Iran: Endless Enemies," Lecture Marine Corps University 28 Feb, 2011, Audio Recording from Middle East Studies Iran Lecture Series, <https://www.mcu.usmc.mil/>.

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⁶⁵ Murray, *U.S. Foreign Policy and Iran*, 94.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 119.

- ⁶⁷ Madeline Albright, "Remarks by Secretary of State Madeline K Albright on American-Iranian Relations," *U.S. Department of State*, March 17, 2000. <http://www.parstimes.com/>.
- ⁶⁸ Limbert, *Negotiating with Iran*, 163-165.
- ⁶⁹ Pollack, *Persian Puzzle*, 346.
- ⁷⁰ Mohsen Milani, "Iran and Afghanistan," *The Iran Primer Power, Politics, and US Policy*, ed. Robin Wright (Washington: United States Institute of Peace, 2010), 157.
- ⁷¹ Stephen Hadley, "The George W. Bush Administration," *The Iran Primer*, 143; and James Dobbins, "Engaging Iran," 204; Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle*, 346-348; and Murray, *U.S. Foreign Policy and Iran*, 146.
- ⁷² Pollack, *Persian Puzzle*, 352-353.
- ⁷³ Crist, *Twilight War*, 455.
- ⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 457.
- ⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 442-455.
- ⁷⁶ Daniel Heradstveit and Matthew Bonham, "What the Axis of Evil Metaphor Did to Iran," *The Middle East Journal*, 61:3 (Summer 2007), 421-440.
- ⁷⁷ Guy Dinmore, "Bush Pressed to Pursue 'Regime Change' in Iran," *The Financial Times*, Jun 18, 2003, <http://www.proquest.com/>.
- ⁷⁸ Slavin, "U.S.-Iran Relations: Catalog of Missed Opportunities."
- ⁷⁹ Hadley, "The George W. Bush Administration," 143; Michael Rubin, "The Guldumann Memorandum: The Iranian "Roadmap" Wasn't a Roadmap and Wasn't Iranian," *The Weekly Standard*, Oct 22, 2007, <http://www.meforum.org/>.
- ⁸⁰ Pollack, *Persian Puzzle*, 359.
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- ⁸³ Crist, *Twilight War*, 470.
- ⁸⁴ Michael Gordon and Bernard Trainor, *Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, From George Bush to Barack Obama* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2012), 101.
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- ⁸⁹ Crist, *Twilight War*, 537.
- ⁹⁰ Ned Parker, "U.S. Targets Shiite Militants; As many as 32 People are Killed in Sadr City, Meanwhile, Maliki visits Iranian leaders," *The Los Angeles Times*, Aug 9, 2007, A4.

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Finding a Measured Response to Iran's Activities

Bradley N. Fultz

The June 2013 presidential election in Iran accompanies a broad optimistic tone for rapprochement in the long standing contested relationship between the United States and Tehran. Despite the change in presidency, however, over three decades of historic precedence endure while mistrust and frustration between the two nations run deep. With detailed analysis of the numerous diplomatic, economic, and military engagements between the countries, Major Brad Fultz (USMC) provides insight into the story behind the headlines, furnishing the reader with a snapshot of the various events since 1979 that have combined to create the problematic situation between Tehran and Washington. Major Fultz traces the past thirty-three years of U.S.-Iran relations following an action/counter-action theme and proposes a policy paradigm for engaging the Islamic Republic in the future.



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