Strategic Consequences of the Termination of Soleimani

Besides the short-term impact of the elimination of Qassem Soleimani in de-escalation of tensions between Washington and Tehran, the strike that took out the mullahs’ mastermind of terror has important strategic consequences for the region. Elimination of Soleimani has significant implications for Iran’s regional adventurism including its influence in Syria and Iraq, Iran’s nuclear deal, and above all for the future of Iranian people’s fight for freedom and democracy. The main long-term consequences of targeting Soleimani include the following.

1. Iran regime’s era of provoking the U.S. is literally and officially over. As the regime’s foreign minister Zarif made it clear in his rushed statement after their feeble “retaliation” targeting empty American and the coalition bases in Iraq by saying that the response was “concluded”. The mullahs learned their lesson that the premise—that President Trump has somehow been weakened by the impeachment proceedings and needs to avoid military confrontation at any cost in order to get reelected--upon which they started their recent provocations was false.

2. Iran nuclear deal or JCPOA is finally and officially dead. Iran’s sole playing card in insisting on the terms of the JCPOA as the framework for negotiations on its nuclear program has been the threats posed by Quds Force and their regional proxies against U.S. interests in the region. The operation that terminated Soleimani, also eliminated the option of further provocations. Therefore, the mullahs have no choice but to accept President Trump’s proposal for a new deal.

3. Because of the pivotal role played by Soleimani in the regime’s regional adventurism, a major fallout of the termination of Soleimani for the mullahs is the collapse of their regional interventionism policy. The central element of Iran’s hegemonic influence in the region has been its military presence in Syria. Now the United States and allies can push for the removal of Iranian forces from Syria, because expelling Iranian forces from Syria is the key step in countering Iran’s destabilizing influence in the region.

4. Iraq has been a main area of the Quds Force’s influence. Iran’s hegemonic influence in the region is nowhere clearer than in Iraq. Now that the people of Iraq are protesting against Iran’s influence...
in Iraq, the United States can support the popular demand and increase its efforts to help independent, secular Iraqi politicians. After years of Iran’s unchallenged dominance in Iraq, a drastic decline in Iran’s influence in Iraq is within reach. It is up to the United States to do everything in its power to help Iraqis achieve their goal.

5. Most importantly, President Trump’s strong and decisive reaction to Iran’s provocations by targeting head of Iran’s terror apparatus has paramount reverberations inside Iran. The dissident majority in Iran has long been convinced that the United States, despite its sometimes-harsh rhetoric against the tyrannical regime, in fact follows an appeasement policy and is not supporting Iranian people’s fight for freedom and democracy. However, the bold action taken by the U.S. in taking out Soleimani has put an end to that long-held belief. Now that the dissident majority in Iran knows the United States is serious in countering the regime’s destabilizing and destructive activities, they act bolder and stronger against the regime. This alone has been heartening and a source of moral support for millions of Iranians and their organized resistance movement. The proof can be seen in the recent outbreak of nations-wide anti-regime demonstrations started on January 11, 2020 across Iran in which protesters have taken to the streets in many cities. Moral and political support of the United States can facilitate the process of Iranians’ fight for freedom and democracy.