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Source Set 1: The Trump Administration's Iran Policy

Instructions: Read the following sources and follow the directions on the handout “Analyzing Media Sources.” Each source is an excerpt taken from an editorial.

Source 1A: “Pompeo Explains the Iran Policy” by Walter Russell Read in the *Wall Street Journal*. January 6, 2020.

Walter Russell Read is a conservative columnist for the Wall Street Journal and Professor of Foreign Affairs and Humanities at Bard College. The full text of the editorial is available at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/pompeo-explains-the-iran-policy-11578354990?mod=opinion_featst_pos3>.

Last year's conventional wisdom was that when it came to Iran, President Trump was all bark and no bite. His aversion to war, especially in the Middle East, was so great that his bluster and threats could be disregarded. That impression solidified after he ordered Iran-bound American planes to turn back last June from their mission to retaliate for Iran's destruction of a U.S. drone. It seemed incontrovertible when there was no military response to Iran's attacks on Saudi oil refineries in September.

But last week's U.S. drone strike destroyed the theory along with Maj. Gen. Qasem Soleimani. As always, media “analysis” shifted immediately, from Mr. Trump as cowardly ditherer to Mr. Trump as implacable war-monger, and either way a clueless toddler acting at random.

Both takes on Mr. Trump's Iran policy miss some critical factors... [Trump] voters reject “endless wars” but also believe the U.S. should respond to attacks on Americans. From the standpoint of his base [dedicated supporters], Mr. Trump's refusal to be drawn into premature responses to the drone and refinery attacks demonstrated patience and restraint. By responding with military force to planned attacks on American personnel and diplomats, he demonstrated courage and resolve... As for whether the assassination of Soleimani was permissible under international law, Mr. Trump's base doesn't care...

The other factor that leads many analysts astray is their conviction that Mr. Trump's foreign policy obviously isn't working. Senior administration officials believe it is working, in Iran and elsewhere, and will bolster the president's re-election effort. They therefore intend to stick with it...

From [the Trump administration's] perspective, Iran has three choices. It can continue to resist while its domestic economy and regional allies suffer under growing resource constraints. It can launch a large-scale attack on Americans—or initiate a dash for the [nuclear] bomb, which would pose a substantial threat to U.S. security—triggering a Pearl Harbor-like reaction from [Trump's] base, which would sustain a massive military response. Or it can enter into serious negotiations over ending its nuclear program, its missile program, and its scheme of terror and subversion in neighboring states.

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Source 1B: “The 2010s Were a Decade of Imperial Overreach. Trump Is Making It Worse.” by Katrina vanden Heuvel in the Washington Post, January 7, 2020.

Katrina vanden Heuvel is a liberal columnist for the Washington Post and the former long-time editor-in-chief of The Nation. The full text of the editorial is available at <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/01/07/s-were-decade-imperial-overreach-trump-is-making-it-worse/>>.

Despite his campaign promises to end forever wars and to pull forces out of the Middle East, Trump has gone along with the national security bureaucracy and a sanctions-happy Congress to extend the United States’ foreign policy and military reach. In the Middle East, the Trump administration stepped up Washington’s “maximum pressure” campaign against Iran—after abandoning the Obama administration’s successful, multilateral nuclear deal. And with the assassination of Iranian Maj. Gen. Qasem Soleimani last week—without congressional approval—already-escalating tensions between the United States and Iran have been raised to new, extraordinarily dangerous levels. Incendiary rhetoric, military brinkmanship and Trump’s recklessness have brought us to the edge of war.

Trump has also undertaken direct military strikes against Syria and placed American troops in the country in an effort to control the country’s oil resources and to block trade with Iraq and Iran. As part of its ongoing goal of countering Iranian influence in the region, the administration has sought to increase its influence in Lebanon and drive a wedge between Iran and Iraq’s governments. And, perhaps most ominously, it has increased the deployment of U.S. troops and weapons systems to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf region. More than 4,000 additional forces are already headed there, with more promised...

The expansion of the United States’ foreign policy goals does not, however, mean the expansion of U.S. influence or greater U.S. security or economic well-being. Indeed, the United States’ influence arguably has declined even as its foreign policy ambitions have increased. Historically, imperial overstretch does not end well, and there is ample evidence that Trump’s foreign policy is failing nearly everywhere.

With this past week’s offensive military action against Iran, it is clear the United States is not retreating under Trump. It is expanding, and in often stupid, militaristic and dangerous ways. It is that expansion that most threatens our security and economic well-being, and it is time that we begin to call out what is happening.

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Source Set 2: The Consequences of the Assassination

Instructions: Read the following sources and follow the directions on the handout “Analyzing Media Sources.” Each source is an excerpt taken from an editorial.

Source 2A: “Suleimani’s Extrajudicial Killing Legitimizes Assassination as a Foreign Policy Tool” by Chas Freeman in *The Nation*, January 6, 2020.

Chas Freeman is a former US ambassador, former Director of the Middle East Policy Council, and current senior fellow at Brown University’s Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs. The full text of the editorial is available at <<https://www.thenation.com/article/suleimani-assassination-escalation/>>.

Late last week, President Trump authorized the radical escalation of America’s 40-year-long conflict with Iran. The January 3 drone attack at Baghdad International Airport was not aimed at deterring an “imminent” attack on Americans, as claimed. It was the preplanned exploitation of a pretext. *Haaretz* [an Israeli newspaper] has reported that Israel, but not the United States Congress, was briefed on the proposed drone strike days before it took place. Its purpose was to eliminate a senior foreign official the Trump administration had designated as an enemy...

The Iranian government seldom makes decisions in haste. It is the heir to one of the world’s longest and greatest traditions of politico-military statecraft. It will make considered judgments as it calculates and plans asymmetric responses that hurt Americans without provoking a large-scale conventional war with the United States. If Tehran miscalculates, which is a very real possibility, the now open but low-intensity warfare between the United States and Iran will escalate...

In foreign policy terms, this drone attack made no sense at all. It was not a deterrent to Iran so much as a provocation. It violated Iraqi sovereignty and the terms of the continuing US military presence in Iraq. It pushed Iraq further into the arms of Iran and invited the humiliating expulsion of US forces from Iraq, which the Iraqi parliament has now called for. It made every American in Iraq and elsewhere a target for murder or hostage-taking. It gave Iranian hard-liners everything they need to make a compelling case for building a nuclear deterrent.

The assassination demonstrated to the world the overt amorality of US policy and the indifference of the United States to the constraints of international law and comity, especially when the object of American hostility is Muslim. It was a strategy-free gambit, equivalent to beginning a game of chess with only an opening move in mind...

Americans, once the most prominent proponents of international law as the regulator of relations between nations, have just fully validated the law of the jungle and appeared to legitimize assassination as a tool of foreign policy. We are now likely to experience it ourselves.

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Source 2B: “In Killing Soleimani, Trump Enforces the Red Line He Drew on Iran” by Marc Thiessen in the Washington Post January 3, 2020.

Marc Thiessen is a conservative columnist for the Washington Post and a former speechwriter for President George W. Bush. The full text of the editorial is available at <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/01/03/killing-soleimani-trump-enforces-red-line-he-drew-iran/>>.

President Trump’s decision to kill Iranian Revolutionary Guard Quds Force commander Maj. Gen. Qasem Soleimani should have come as no surprise to the Iranian regime. The administration had drawn a clear red line, warning Iranian leaders they would pay a severe price if they killed a U.S. citizen...

The message the administration sent to Iran was crystal clear: 1) any attacks on Americans would elicit a military response; and 2) the United States would henceforth hold Iran responsible for the actions of its terrorist proxies. To underscore the message, Trump designated the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps—including its Quds Force—as a foreign terrorist organization. This made Soleimani a legitimate military target.

For months, Iran danced around Trump’s new red line, carrying out increasingly bold attacks against U.S. targets, allies and interests—but assiduously avoiding U.S. casualties. First, it attacked Japanese and Norwegian oil tankers. Then, it shot down an unmanned U.S. drone (while avoiding a manned American P-8 aircraft that was reportedly flying in the area). Then, it attacked Saudi oil facilities.

In each case, the president demonstrated enormous restraint. He tightened economic sanctions on the regime in Tehran. He launched cyberattacks against Iran’s military capabilities. And he warned Iran that his patience was not without limits. “I think a lot of restraint has been shown by us but that doesn’t mean we’re going to show it in the future,” Trump said.

Iran misread Trump’s restraint for weakness—and miscalculated. On Dec. 27, an Iranian proxy militia, Kataib Hezbollah, launched a rocket attack against a military base in the Iraqi city of Kirkuk that killed a U.S. military contractor and injured four U.S. servicemembers. With that attack, Iran crossed the red line Trump had set. Trump struck back militarily, hitting Kataib Hezbollah targets in Iraq and Syria—and U.S. officials began discussing a strike against Iran.

Meanwhile, Iran escalated further. Kataib Hezbollah overran and set fire to the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, an attack a senior U.S. official told me was coordinated with Soleimani. U.S. officials watched as Soleimani flew into Baghdad to meet with Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the leader of the Kataib Hezbollah militia. According to the U.S. official, the United States had “exquisite intelligence” that the two men were planning an attack that could have killed hundreds of Americans.

Seizing that opportunity, Trump took them both out. His action was defensive, preemptive and lawful. Had Trump not acted and Americans had died, he would have been excoriated—and rightly so. Instead, he took bold action that disrupted that attack and took Soleimani and Muhandis off the battlefield.

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Source Set 3: The Effects on People in Iran and Iraq

Instructions: Read the following sources and follow the directions on the handout “Analyzing Media Sources.” Each source is an excerpt taken from an editorial.

Source 3A: “Iranians United” by Camelia Entekhabifard in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, a French news journal reporting on politics, culture, and current affairs, January 7, 2020.

Camelia Entekhabifard is an Iranian journalist and editor-in-chief of the Independent Persian. The full text of the editorial is available at <<https://mondediplo.com/outsidein/iranians-united>>.

The modern history of Iran has never seen a commemoration as big as the one held for Major General Qasim Suleimani who was killed at the orders of President Donald Trump in Iraq...

Millions of mourners from Ahvaz, in the south of Iran, to Mashhad, Tehran and Qom, rallied in the streets to show their anger and say farewell... Suleimani’s [funeral]...attract[ed] groups of Iranians of different factions and interests, regardless of their affiliations or loyalty to the system.

It’s not difficult to identify the sentiment that united Iranians around this event. The flag was conspicuous—even though the Revolutionary Guards are not popular among Iranians, especially as many disapprove of their actions in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. But it seems that the mourners’ motivations went beyond their affiliation to the assassinated commander, focusing mainly on the unjust manner in which he was killed, and reacting to the acute hurt to their national pride and sense of outrage when Trump threatened to bomb Iran and named 52 cultural sites as targets in his tweets.

Iranians are famously proud of their history and heritage, and Trump’s tweets unified all sections of society, regardless of their feelings towards the regime. These tweets may, paradoxically, have helped the Iranian government in the face of domestic unpopularity and accusations of illegitimacy that dogged it less than three months ago with massive demonstrations demanding the overthrow of the ayatollahs [the leaders of the Iranian government]...

Yet at this most troubled time in Iran, Trump chose to order the assassination of the most popular figure in the entire system...

The assassination of a man Trump called a terrorist even caused the Iraqi parliament to request the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq. Like Iranians, up to two weeks ago Iraqis were also on the streets demonstrating—not least against Iran’s meddling in their country, chanting ‘Iran out’. The US act...has fuelled strong anti US sentiment in the wider region, since in any confrontation resulting from an escalation, the Arab nations will pay a heavy price.

President Trump has unintentionally helped the regime in Tehran on the domestic front and paused the anti-Iran regional outcry, from Lebanon and Iraq, to conflicted Yemen and Syria.

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Source 3B: “The Iraqi People Will Pay the Price for Iran-US Rivalry, Again” by Fanar Haddad in Al-Jazeera January 9, 2020.

Fanar Haddad is a research fellow at the Middle East Institute and is the author of Sectarianism in Iraq: Antagonistic Visions of Unity. The full text of the editorial is available at <<https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/profile/fanar-haddad-.html>>.

The assassination of General Qassem Soleimani, the head of the Quds Force of Iran’s Islamic Republican Guard Corps (IRCG), has placed Iraq at the centre of an international geopolitical crisis that could see the country turn into the front lines in a war it neither wants nor is able to prevent.

One of the early casualties of the recent escalation in US-Iranian tensions has been the [Iraqi] protest movement [that had begun in October 2019].

Lost in the din is the unambiguous message that has consistently been heard in Tahrir Square [in Baghdad] and other protest sites: no to foreign interference of any kind. That Iran took the lion’s share of opprobrium in [Iraqi] protest messaging [since October] is a reflection of the greater role that Iran has had in Iraq rather than of pro-American sentiment among the protesters.

However, today a binary of anti-Americanism and anti-Iranianism is being instrumentalised and imposed on the Iraqi public discourse in an attempt to prioritise Iran-US rivalries, rally pro-Iranian forces and outflank the [Iraqi] protest movement.

In itself, Soleimani’s death will neither change Iran’s regional policy nor will it weaken its network of hybrid forces. The most immediate consequence of the assassination thus far has been to strengthen Iran’s hand in Iraq. Combined with the seeming absence of strategic thinking on the issue in Washington, this may well prove to be an irreversible shift...

The bigger tragedy is that Iraqis are set to pay the price, yet again, for US and Iranian policies and the perpetual rivalry between the two.

However, it is too early to start writing the obituary of Iraq’s protest movement. Iraq is in the midst of a prolonged government formation process mired in constitutional and legal ambiguity following the resignation of [Prime Minister] Adil Abdul-Mahdi’s government in December. The momentum built by the protesters had effectively turned the street into a participant in those negotiations.

The current crisis has not fundamentally changed that fact and the protest movement is as adamant on the necessity of systemic change as ever before. They may have lost the limelight and political priority but the movement remains relevant to the government formation process and an important variable in Iraqi politics. This is as relevant to the Iraqi political classes as it is to Iran’s future plans in Iraq.