

Watch What Iran Does, But Also Listen To What They Say

by Kenneth R. Timmerman

President-Elect Trump will be tested by the Islamic state of Iran soon after taking office on January 20. It could come the very day of his inauguration with an enormous (if superficial) head-fake, as they gave President Reagan by releasing our U.S. diplomat-hostages the very minute he swore the oath of office. Or it could come later, in a less benign form.

But this much is certain: that test will come, and the foreign policy establishment in Washington will fail to see it coming and mistakenly interpret it once it occurs. Again.

Establishment analysts focus on Iran's actions. In itself, that is not a bad thing, but it's kind of like buying a peach at an American supermarket because of its wonderful good looks, only to cut it open at home to find it wooden and tasteless.

In addition to examining Iran's actions, we need to pay close attention to what the Islamic regime's leaders say. We need to understand their ideology, and their goals. Above all, we must not assume – as most analysts do – that they think using the same cost-benefit calculus we do.

This is a regime driven by ideology, fueled on a vision of the end times just as our sun is fueled by its magma. Only rarely does the fuel erupt and become a measurable “event,” although when that happens, it can be deadly. Scientists have warned for years that our electric power grid is vulnerable not only to man-made Electromagnetic Pulse (EMP), but to a massive coronal ejection from the sun.

In the same way, the United States remains vulnerable to a

massive event, potentially devastating, caused by the confluence of the Iranian regime's ideology and its military capabilities. Like EMP or a massive coronal ejection, such an occurrence will be a low probability-high impact event. Will we detect that confluence before it happens? If the past record of our intelligence community and our political leaders is any gauge, the answer is a resounding no.

Here's why.

Even the best analysts of the foreign policy establishment limit their analysis to the actions and capabilities of the regime. They note, for example, that when the United States Navy retaliated by sinking Iranian warships after the regime's unpredicted and confusing decision to lay mines in the Strait of Hormuz, the regime leadership backed off. [Operation Praying Mantis](#) is still viewed as a resounding success.

They mistakenly took this to mean that the ruling clerics and the fanatical Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) who serve them respected American power; specifically, that they can be deterred.

They discount the chants of "Death to America" the regime leaders have instilled in the generations of the revolution as so much hot air. It's just bombast. Nothing to see here. Move along, the analysts say.

As proof there is nothing to this relentless inculcation of the regime's ultimate goal they point to similar claims involving the military. For decades, military leaders have claimed they were building indigenous fighter jets, helicopters and tanks; none have ever moved beyond a few prototypes.

Iranians are prone to exaggeration, they say. How can you tell an Iranian is lying? *Because his lips are moving.* I have heard respected U.S. intelligence analysts make such a silly – and dangerous – claim.

And of course, Iranians *are* prone to exaggeration. That much is true. But even in those exaggerations, they reveal their goals and aspirations, and we simply dismiss them as hot air.

For nearly thirty-five years, IRGC leaders and their clerical puppet-masters have boasted they would drive the United States from the Middle East.

“I can remember my father telling me after the Beirut attack on the U.S. Marines that Iran had won,” the son of former IRGC commander Maj. Gen. Mohsen Rezai told me after he defected to the United States. “He said, with a single bomb, we have forced the Americans to pull out of Lebanon. With a few more bombs, we will force them out of the region entirely.”

Such was their goal at that time, and it remains their goal today—except that they are a lot closer to fulfilling it. What once was a long-term aspiration, which nobody in the Washington policy establishment believed, has become a tactical goal whose accomplishment Iran’s leadership can see on the near horizon.

Ever since October 1983 when the regime ordered its proxies to murder 242 U.S. Marines, they have been probing our weaknesses. That is the only way you can explain the outrageous violation of international law in January 2016 when IRGC gunboats captured U.S. sailors gone adrift at sea and humiliated them in front of cameras.

That’s the only way you can understand the installation of Chinese made C-802 ship-killing missiles on the Red Sea coast of Yemen, where IRGC crews [actually fired](#) on a U.S. warship in October.

They are testing us, probing our defenses and our willingness to accept pain. They are constantly evaluating our political resolve to resist their goal of driving us from the region.

Under Obama, of course, they found us sorely lacking. From his

first days in office, President Obama told the Iranians openly he would end the long-standing U.S. "hostility" toward the Islamic regime. He wanted to "open a channel" for talks, and did.

Iran's ruling mullahs quickly decided to test Mr. Obama. When three million Iranians took to the streets of Tehran and other cities to protest the stolen "re-selection" of President Mahmoud Ahmedinejad as President, they held up signs in English for the CNN cameras. "Obama are you with us?" they said.

When Obama failed to respond or provide even lip-service to the yearning for freedom of the Iranian people, the regime responded on cue. Regime officials went on state television, pointing to photos of the U.S. president. "*Obam'ast*," they said, turning his name into a play on words. "He's with us."

And Obama showed by his actions that he was with them. As Congress imposed an ever-rigorous set of sanctions aimed to reducing Iran's oil exports and access to international financing, Obama initially waived their application. Only a relentless bi-partisan push-back caused him to allow the sanctions go into force – with devastating impact on Iran's economy.

By 2014, the regime was scrambling, fearful that income from reduced oil exports would not be enough to cover subsidies on basic foodstuffs to the poor, leading their most faithful supporters to revolt.

That is when Obama carried out the most astonishing, unnecessary, unilateral capitulation since Chamberlin went to Munich in 1938, offering to remove the sanctions for a temporary reduction in Iran's nuclear programs.

The traditional foreign policy establishment and its ally, the pro-Tehran lobby, is holding seminars and writing opeds and whispering into whatever ears they can find that President-

Elect Trump [must hold on](#) to the nuclear deal.

Why? It's all about actions, and can be measured. They do not want the President-Elect or his advisors focusing on the intentions and goals of Iran's clerical leaders and their IRGC enforcers. Because to do so would reveal not just the folly, but the tremendous danger inherent in the nuclear deal, which legitimizes the Islamic state of Iran as a nuclear power ten years down the road.

What's ten years, when you are staring at all eternity? That's how Ayatollah Khamenei and the IRGC generals think. That's how their successors will think, if the current regime remains in power.

Their goal was and remains to erase Israel from the map (or "from the pages of history," if you want to get literal), and to bring about Death to America. And yet, if there's any effort underway to measure their progress toward those goals in our intelligence and policy establishment, none of our political leaders have taken it seriously.

We ignore the ideology of the Tehran regime and its long-term goals at our peril. President-Elect Trump needs strategists who think outside the box, one reason I am thrilled by the appointments of Lt. General Mike Flynn as National Security advisor and General James T. Mattis as Secretary of Defense.

The Iranians know there's not a moment to lose. Do we?

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