

An Iranian Spring on the horizon?

20th February 2020

When news broke out that President Trump had signed off on the assassination of General Qassem Soleimani, followed by Iran's retaliation, the prospect of a 'second Iraq War' or more concerningly a World War III almost became a harsh reality. However, the "unintentional" downing of the Ukraine International Airlines jet has seemed to quieten the prospects of war between the U.S. and Iran. While the U.S. and Trump became the enemies of the Iranian people, they have turned their attention on their own government. Could we be seeing the start of an Iranian Spring?



Since Donald Trump pulled America out of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal in 2018 and subsequently piled on sanctions, tensions between the two countries have been frosty to say the least. The obvious high point was early this month with the assassination of Qassem Soleimani, considered the second most powerful man in Iran, after the Ayatollah Khamenei. The 'act of war' instantly put the world on high alert of a very possible conflict between the U.S. and Iran, with Iran promising revenge and Trump stating his readiness to target Iranian culture sites. However, this sudden hot temperedness has seemed to dissipate due to the targeting of the Ukrainian passenger jet in which all 176 passengers were killed. Now that Iran has admitted to unintentional downing of the Ukrainian flight, it seems that both sides have calmed down in light of a tragedy that was a result of collateral damage. However, the admission of guilt has sparked social unrest among Iranian citizens, whose anger and discontent are aimed at the Iranian regime.

Not only have the tensions calmed down between the two powers, but it seems that the oil prices have steadied after the instability of the first half of January. After the assassination of Soleimani, oil prices rose to \$70 per barrel with experts warning that the price could double to \$150 per barrel if the conflict were to continue. Now, that Tehran and Washington have taken the foot of the accelerator, so-to-speak, oil prices have settled down to around \$58 per barrel. But will this last?

It looks like Trump will not escalate the situation by imposing further sanctions on Iran for the moment, however, he is known to be unpredictable and to go back on his word. Assuming, he won't (and that's a big assumption), could there be the possibility of another Iranian attack, one which targets the oil prices? Possibly avenues for Iran to attack have been quashed since their mistake with the Ukrainian flight, including direct attacks on U.S. sites in the region and even attacks on U.S. allies in the region such as Israel and Saudi Arabia seem unlikely at the moment. Other avenues of disruption such as closing the Strait of Hormuz again is also seems unlikely, as doing so would inevitably cause serious tensions

between the U.S. and its allies (UK). If Iran does aim to destabilise oil prices it is likely then that Iran will use their proxies to affect oil production in the Middle East.

While the brevity of the escalation has been welcomed by the West, Iran finds itself still in trouble, this time with its own people. Protests have been going on since November 2019 due to the rising oil prices and the oppressive Khamenei regime. The people were distracted with the killing of Soleimani but after Iran admitted to shooting down the Ukrainian flight, the people ceased chanting 'death to America' and instead were chanting 'death to the Supreme Leader'. Seeing as that chant is punishable by death, it demonstrates the importance of this social unrest, one which cannot be ignored. Mass arrests and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) opening fire into crowds of protestors has surprisingly not calmed the public's fury. Even though Khamenei has stated the people responsible for the downing of the Ukrainian flight have been punished, this has not slowed down the momentum of the protestors. With anti-American sentiment still strong in Iran, anti-establishment sentiment is in the limelight. While an 'Iranian Spring' by the end of the month is unlikely, the protestors' fierce attempt to change the status quo might pay off in the near future...

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