

Trump's Evidence About Iran is "Dodgy" at Best

ROBERT FISK

The crackpot president of the United States of America has so snarled up the gangplank to truth these past 29 months that no matter how much "evidence" he and his crew produce to prove that the Iranians have been trying to blow up oil tankers in the Gulf of Oman—or not quite blow them up—the pictures have a kind of mesmeric quality about them.

Donald Trump's 2017 inauguration photos were edited to "prove" that there were more supporters on the Washington Mall than actually went there. And now his administration, anxious to prove that the Iranians are attacking oil tankers, releases video footage of Iranians actually removing a limpet mine from the hull of a Japanese vessel.

Well that proves it then, doesn't it? Those pesky Iranians can't even bomb their targets professionally—so they go back later to retrieve a mine because it probably says "Made in Iran" on the explosives.

Because that would give them away, wouldn't it? Then it emerges that the tanker crew believe they were attacked with airborne munitions—and mines don't fly. The crew on another bombed ship suggest a torpedo. And on the basis of this, Washington is now "building a consensus" among its allies for the "decisive" response which Trump's Saudi chums are demanding against Iran in revenge for these and earlier non-lethal attacks off the Emirates.

And our own beloved foreign secretary, ever mindful that he needs a majority of the party's most faithful 120,000 votes to make him the next Tory Ayatollah, is "confident" that those wretched Iranians were behind the mining attacks. Presumably the *hojatoleslam*—for so Jeremy Hunt must remain unless he becomes the Supreme Leader—also believed the doctored pictures of the crowds welcoming Trump's presidency on the National Mall in Washington.

Personally, I suspect the Iranians have been up to their old mining tricks in the Gulf, first practised in 1988 on the supertankers which the US Navy was escorting up to Kuwait at the end of the Iran-Iraq war—when it turned out that the American warships had to hide behind the tankers in case they, too, got mined. On that occasion, the Americans actually found a crew of Iranians rolling mines

off a clapped-out old landing vessel. They captured the Iranians sailors and even gave them the option of political asylum in the Land of the Free. Foolish chaps, they all declined the offer.

Besides, if Hezbollah successfully fired an Iranian-supplied sea-to-sea missile at an Israeli naval gunboat off Lebanon in 2006—which they did, setting the ship alight and killing several of the Israeli crew—I doubt if Tehran has many scruples about teaching the Houthis how to use drones for rocket attacks on Saudi Arabia.

When US munitions—dropped by the Saudis and the United Arab Emirates—are blowing up Houthi rebels, schools, hospitals, wedding parties, etc, in Yemen—why should it be surprising if the Houthis use Iranian munitions to try to blow up Saudi airports? With a little more training, the Houthis might even reach the technical prowess of their Saudi and Emirati enemies by also firing rockets at schools, hospitals and wedding parties, etc, in Saudi Arabia.

There's also a "Suez" feel about all this. When the ever more exasperated Anthony Eden plunged with the French and Israelis into the Suez fiasco in 1956, Eisenhower had to send Dulles to London to rein in the British prime minister. Eden had himself become a bit bananas, claiming that Nasser, whose country he was planning to invade, was the "Mussolini of the Nile". Dulles's instructions were to tell Eden: "Whoa, Boy!" For months afterwards, Eden was still lying to the Commons, insisting that the whole shambles had NOT been hatched up with the Israelis—which it had—his false denial of the plot actually believed by most of the Tory party at the time and probably by a majority of Brits.

I guess that's why I find something profoundly odd about the whole US-Iranian conflict-to-be. A couple of days ago, back in Beirut after a long road journey across Lebanon, I forced myself to read through the past months of news reports on the coming war between the US and Iran—even though I believe, and continue to feel certain, that this impending Armageddon is a figment of the Trump-Bolton-Pompeo imagination. And of the imagination of the American media—which is fearful that Trump might go to war but, given its rousing headlines let alone its reports, even more frightened that he might not go

to war.

Perhaps it's the sheer exhaustion of reading through the volumes of mendacity from the White House on Trump's support for the Middle East's vicious Arab dictators and head-choppers—and corpse-chopper-uppers—that I'd almost convinced myself that it was the deceitful, lying, belligerent Iranians who reneged on the solemn nuclear deal, falsely claiming that Washington had not honoured the agreement.

But then, of course, I remembered that it was the deceitful, lying, belligerent Americans who reneged on the solemn nuclear deal, falsely claiming that Tehran had not honoured the agreement.

But that's life in Trumpworld right now.

The Iranians, who have always understood the west much better than the west has ever understood the Iranians, know very well how to deny a drone here and a limpet mine there while ever more diligently tugging another feather or two out of the American eagle. The Iranians are no innocents.

There are no good guys in this story. And sure, if Iran tries to close the Straits of Hormuz, America can react with that consensus-built "decisive response" called for by the Saudis and underwritten by *Hojatoleslam* Hunt. But Iran is not quite that stupid. Why should the Islamic Republic fight the Americans when it was the US which humbled its principal post-revolution enemies: the Taliban and then Saddam and then Isis? The Iranians were—or should have been—extremely grateful.

In the real world, of course, there should be a military alliance between the US and Iran. But Washington no longer moves through any known orbit. If you want to understand the Trump-Bolton Middle East policy right now, I guess all you can do is visit patients in any mental hospital and they'll fill you in.

Russia and China, however, do live on planet Earth. They probably saw the photos of Trump's diminished supporters on the Washington Mall and drew their own conclusions. So stand by to hear Vladimir Putin or Xi Jinping, albeit doubtful allies of Tehran, hollering out to Trump: "Whoa Boy!"

Robert Fisk writes for the Independent, where this column originally appeared.

In the real world, of course, there should be a military alliance between the US and Iran. But Washington no longer moves through any known orbit. If you want to understand the Trump-Bolton Middle East policy right now, I guess all you can do is visit patients in any mental hospital and they'll fill you in.