

A Tonkin Gulf Incident in the Gulf of Oman?

A week ago, the MT Mercer Street, a Japanese-owned tanker managed by a U.K.-based company owned by Israeli billionaire Eyal Ofer, sailing in the Arabian Sea off the coast of Oman, was struck by drones. A British security guard and Romanian crew member were killed. Britain and the U.S. immediately blamed Iran, and the Israelis began to beat the war drums.

Monday, Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz said action against Iran should be taken “right now.” Tuesday, Prime Minister Naftali Bennett warned Israel could “act alone.”

“They can’t sit calmly in Tehran while igniting the entire Middle East—that’s over,” said Bennett. “We are working to enlist the whole world, but when the time comes, we know how to act alone.” Wednesday, Gantz ratcheted it up, “Now is the time for deeds—words are not enough. ... It is time for diplomatic, economic, and even military deeds. Otherwise the attacks will continue.”

Thursday, Gantz went further: “Israel is ready to attack Iran, yes. ... We are at a point where we need to take military action against Iran. The world needs to take action against Iran now.” And what do the Americans say?

“We are confident that Iran conducted this attack,” said Secretary of State Antony Blinken. “We are working with our partners to consider our next steps and consulting with governments inside the region and beyond on an appropriate response, which will be forthcoming.” Iran, however, has repeatedly denied that it ordered the attack.

What makes the attack puzzling is its timing, as it occurred just days before the inauguration of the newly elected president of Iran, the ultraconservative hardliner Ebrahim

Raisi.

Query: Would Raisi have ordered a provocative attack on an Israeli-owned vessel, just days before taking office, when his highest priority is a lifting of the “maximum pressure” sanctions imposed on his country by former President Donald Trump? Why? Would Raisi put at risk his principal diplomatic goal, just to get even with Israel for some earlier pinprick strike in the tit-for-tat war in which Iran and Israel have been engaged for years? Again, why?

If not Raisi, would the outgoing president, the moderate Hassan Rouhani, have ordered such an attack on his last hours in office and risk igniting a war with Israel and the U.S. that his country could not win? Could the attack have been the work of rogue elements in the Iranian Republican Guard Corps? Gantz and Foreign Minister Yair Lapid claim that Saeed Ara Jani, head of the drones section of the IRGC, “is the man personally responsible for the terror attacks in the Gulf of Oman.”

Or was this simply a reflexive Iranian reprisal for Israeli attacks? For years, Israel and Iran have been in a shadow war, with Iran backing Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthi rebels in Yemen, and the Shia militia in Syria and Iraq. Israel has both initiated and responded to attacks with strikes on Iranian-backed militia in Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq, and by sabotaging Iran’s nuclear program and assassinating its nuclear scientists.

But whoever was behind the attack in the Gulf of Oman, and whatever the political motive, the U.S. was not the target, and the U.S. should not respond militarily to a drone strike that was not aimed at us. No one has deputized us to police the Middle East, and we have not prospered these last two decades by having deputized ourselves. With America leaving Afghanistan and U.S. troops in Iraq transiting out of any “combat” role, now is not the time to get us ensnared in a new

war with Iran.

Lest we forget. It was in an August, 57 years ago, that the Tonkin Gulf incident occurred, which led America to plunge into an eight-year war in Vietnam.

President Joe Biden's diplomatic goal with Iran, since taking office, has been the resurrection of the 2015 nuclear deal from which former President Donald Trump walked away. In return for Iran's reacceptance of strict conditions on its nuclear program, the U.S. has offered a lifting of Trump's sanctions.

Whoever launched the drone strike sought to ensure that no new U.S.-Iran deal is consummated, that U.S. sanctions remain in place, and that a U.S. war with Iran remain a possibility. But again, why would Tehran carry out such a drone attack and kill crewmen on an Israeli-owned vessel—then loudly deny it?

Since he took office, Biden has revealed his intent to extricate the U.S. from the “forever wars” of the Middle East and to pivot to the Far East and China. By this month's end, all U.S. forces are to be out of Afghanistan, and the 2,500 U.S. troops still in Iraq are to be repurposed, no longer to be designated as combat troops.

Those behind this attack on the Israeli-owned vessel do not want to reduce the possibility of war between the United States and Iran. They want to make it a reality. We ought not accommodate them.

COPYRIGHT 2021 CREATORS.COM

—

Dear Readers,

Big Tech is suppressing our reach, refusing to let us advertise and squelching our ability to serve up a steady

diet of truth and ideas. Help us fight back by [becoming a member](#) for just \$5 a month and then join the discussion on Parler [@CharlemagneInstitute](#) and Gab [@CharlemagneInstitute](#)!

Image Credit:

Brookings Institution, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0 , via flickr