Classified/Top Secret (No Just Kidding)

June 11, 2019

Presidential Review Directive 37

To: The Secretary of State

The Secretary of Defense

The Secretary of Energy

The Secretary of the Treasury

Attorney General

The Secretary of Homeland Security

National Security Advisor

CC: Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

Director of National Intelligence

Subject: Iranian Role in Syrian Conflict

The President has directed that the National Security Council undertake a review of Iranian policy in the Syrian conflict. US, European, and Middle Eastern intelligence sources suggest that Iran is preparing to intervene more directly in the conflict in an attempt to consolidate the Assad regime’s hold on power, further weaken the Islamic State in the Levant (ISIL), and to enhance Iranian power in the region. Globally, Russia’s role in this is of particular importance. Regionally, the impact of Iranian action in Syria also has ab impact on the Iranian-Saudi and Iranian-Israeli rivalries.

The review should focus on the following concerns:

1. What are the regional implications of Iranian intervention in the Syrian conflict? How will this impact the balance of power among the major nations in the area (Israel, Saudi Arabia, Turkey)? How will it influence the course of political development in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Egypt?
2. What are the political-military implications of Iranian intervention? What kind of forces can Iran bring to bear in the region? What is the potential that Iranian intervention in Syria will be accompanied by additional Iranian actions (in Lebanon through Hezbollah, in the Strait of Hormuz, or elsewhere)? How will Iranian intervention shape the course of the war in Syria (for the democratic leaning rebels or for the Sunni radical elements)? If there is no western or regional response to Iranian intervention, will this intervention be decisive – lead to a reassertion of the Assad regime’s authority)? What are the capabilities and possible response of local powers to deal with Iranian intervention? What are the probable responses of local powers to the Iranian intervention (consider key players such as Israel, Egypt, Iraq, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia)?
3. How would Iranian intervention in Syria effect the US actions in Syria and Iraq: US aid to selected Syrian rebels and military activities designed to defeat ISIL in Syria and Iraq?
4. How deeply might we expect Russia to intervene in this crisis? How would Russian influence in the region be enhanced by Iranian intervention? Would it solidify a cold war between Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf States (backed by the US) vs. an Iranian, Syrian, Hezbollah axis (backed by Russia)? How could this intervention enhance Russian power projection capabilities in the region and Russia’s global ambitions? Where would Israel fit into this?
5. If the US should decide to use force, what options are available given current US capabilities in the region?
6. What are the global diplomatic implications of a potential intervention? How likely is it that the UN Security Council will be able to mount a response to Iranian actions? What will be the response of other Perm 5 members (Russia, China, UK, France) as well as other key players (European Union, the Arab League, the Organization of the Islamic Conference)?
7. What are the humanitarian implications (refugees, civilian deaths) of any US response to Iranian intervention?
8. What are the counterterrorism implications of any US response, both in terms of the impact on Sunni-radical movements such as ISIL, and the Iranian-Hezbollah alliance? Will more assertive US actions in the Middle East lead to increased or decreased efforts by global terrorist organizations to target the US? How will it impact US attempts to decrease terrorist recruitment throughout the Middle East and Asia?
9. How will potential US-Iranian direct confrontation impact proliferation issues? Will this lead to an acceleration of Iranian nuclear weapons activities and/or lead Iran to give nuclear-related materials to a group such as Hezbollah (likely in the form of a radiological weapon)?
10. What are the economic implications, particularly related to the oil market, given Iranian intervention and a potentially wider war in the Middle East? What is the potential for using economic sanctions to persuade Iran to reverse its actions in Syria?
11. Analysis should also include consideration of whether the US could or should use an Iranian intervention in Syria as an excuse to move to eliminate the Iranian nuclear program and/or instigate a change of leadership in Tehran. The legal implications of this should be assessed. In such a case, what are the likely responses of the key nations in the region: Israel, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Egypt, Turkey?
12. How will the US global reputation be shaped by the potential range of US responses? If the US refrains from acting forcefully, will this be perceived as a continued withdraw of the US from Middle Eastern affairs or can a forceful US response be seen as a reassertion of US power in the region following a decade of setbacks?
13. How will the US Congress and American people react during a debate about potential US intervention in the Middle East? Is there support in Congress for a confrontation with Iran? What levels of intervention would be acceptable to Congress and the American people?
14. Attention should be paid to the various policy options available to the US. The following list should not be seen as excluding other options:
    1. Continued diplomatic pressure only.
    2. An intensification of multilateral diplomacy through the UN and regional organizations.
    3. Increased material support for select non-radical members of the Syrian opposition.
    4. Naval options in the Mediterranean Sea, Red Sea (including Suez Canal), Persian Gulf, Arabian Sea, and Indian Ocean.
    5. The use of US and Western airpower to support select non-radical rebels and to disrupt and degrade the impact of the Iranian intervention.
    6. Reintroduction of large scale US military forces into Iraq as an obstacle to Iranian moves and as an increase in US efforts against ISIL.
    7. US air strikes against Syrian and Iranian targets to weaken both regimes’ ability to engage in military operations.
    8. US air strikes designed to undermine both regimes as a first step toward regime change in Damascus and Tehran.
15. What is the end game? In the best of all possible worlds, how do we see the Syrian civil war ending and what are the implications of that scenario? In the worst of all possible worlds, how do we see the civil war ending and what are the implications of that scenario?

**Tasking (These are the research questions assigned for your role)**

The following officials will be responsible for background papers that will support the drafting of a Presidential Review Directive.

***State Department***

Secretary of State: How will US global reputation be shaped by the potential range of US responses? If the US refrains from acting forcefully, will this be perceived as a continued withdraw of the US from Middle Eastern affairs or can a forceful US response be seen as a reassertion of US power in the region following a decade of setbacks?

Deputy Secretary of State: What are the possible responses of local powers to the Iranian intervention (consider key players such as Israel, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia)?

US Ambassador to the United Nations: What are the global diplomatic implications of a potential intervention? How likely is it that the UN Security Council will be able to mount a response to Iranian actions? What will be the response of other Perm 5 members (Russia, China, UK, France)?

***Department of Defense***

Secretary of Defense: If the US should decide to use force, what options are available given current US capabilities in the region?

Deputy Secretary of Defense: How deeply might we expect Russia to intervene in this crisis? How would Russian influence in the region be enhanced by Iranian intervention? What would be the likely response of Turkey to any Iranian intervention (backed by Russia)?

JCS Chair: What is the potential for Iranian intervention in Syria to be accompanied by additional Iranian actions (in Lebanon through Hezbollah, in the Strait of Hormuz, or elsewhere)?

***Department of Energy*** (Meets with Treasury Department)

Secretary of Energy: What are the economic implications, particularly related to the oil market, given Iranian intervention and a potential wider war in the Middle East?

Deputy Secretary of Energy: How will potential US-Iranian direct confrontation impact proliferation issues? Will this lead to an acceleration of Iranian nuclear weapons activities and/or lead Iran to give nuclear-related materials to a group such as Hezbollah (more likely in the form of a radiological weapon)?

***Department of the Treasury*** (Meets with Energy Department)

Secretary of the Treasury: What are the economic implications, particularly related to the oil market, given Iranian intervention and a potential wider war in the Middle East?

Deputy Secretary of the Treasury: What are the economic implications, particularly related to the oil market, given Iranian intervention and a potential wider war in the Middle East?

***Department of Justice*** (Meets with Department of Homeland Security)

Attorney General: The US may consider whether Iranian intervention could or should be used as an excuse to move to eliminate the Iranian nuclear program and/or instigate a change of leadership in Tehran. What are the legal implications of this in the context of just war theory and international law?

Deputy Attorney General: Will more assertive US actions in the Middle East lead to increased or decreased efforts by global terrorist organizations to target the US? How will it impact US attempts to decrease terrorist recruitment throughout the Middle East and Asia?

***Department of Homeland Security*** (Meets with Department of Justice)

Secretary of Homeland Security: Will more assertive US actions in the Middle East lead to increased or decreased efforts by global terrorist organizations to target the US? How will it impact US attempts to decrease terrorist recruitment throughout the Middle East and Asia?

Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security: Will more assertive US actions in the Middle East lead to increased or decreased efforts by global terrorist organizations to target the US? How will it impact US attempts to decrease terrorist recruitment throughout the Middle East and Asia?

***National Security Council Staff*** (Meets with White House Staff)

National Security Advisor: What is the end game? In the best of all possible worlds, how do we see the Syrian civil war ending and what are the implications of that scenario? In the worst of all possible worlds, how do we see the civil war ending and what are the implications of that scenario?

Deputy National Security Advisor: What is the potential for Iranian intervention in Syria to be accompanied by additional Iranian actions (in Lebanon through Hezbollah, in the Strait of Hormuz, or elsewhere)?

Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Strategic Planning: How will US global reputation be shaped by the potential range of US responses? If the US refrains from acting forcefully, will this be perceived as a continued withdraw of the US from Middle Eastern affairs or can a forceful US response be seen as a reassertion of US power in the region following a decade of setbacks?

***Intelligence Community***

Director of National Intelligence: What are the political-military implications of Iranian intervention? What kind of forces can Iran bring to bear in the region?

Deputy Director of National Intelligence: How deeply might we expect Russia to intervene in this crisis? How would Russian influence in the region be enhanced by Iranian intervention? What would be the likely response of Turkey to any Iranian intervention (backed by Russia)?

Director of Central Intelligence: What is the potential for Iranian intervention in Syria to be accompanied by additional Iranian actions (in Lebanon through Hezbollah, in the Strait of Hormuz, or elsewhere)?

***Meetings***

During interagency meetings later in the year, the NSC will assess the following options and provide a recommendation to the President in the form of a draft Presidential Review Directive ***that assess each option in Item 14*** and recommend one. The study papers assigned above form the background work for the NSC interagency process. As per PD-1 Organization of the National Security Council Process (imaginary document from the Newmann Administration), membership in the key interagency groups is as follows:

***NSC/PC***

1. Chair: National Security Advisor
2. Secretary of State
3. Secretary of Defense
4. Secretary of Energy
5. Secretary of Treasury
6. Attorney General
7. Secretary of Homeland Security
8. Director of National Intelligence
9. US Ambassador to the United Nations (State Dept)
10. Chair Joint Chiefs of Staff

***NSC/DC***

1. Chair: Deputy National Security Advisor
2. Deputy Secretary of State
3. Deputy Secretary of Defense
4. Deputy Secretary of Energy
5. Deputy Secretary of Treasury
6. Deputy Attorney General
7. Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security
8. Deputy Director of National Intelligence
9. Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Strategic Planning (NSC Staff)
10. Director of Central Intelligence