

Tension in the Gulf of Oman: Attacks at sea - lessons from US history

Wednesday 19 June 2019, by [PASHKOFF Susan](#) (Date first published: 16 June 2019).

Watching the news about the [attacks](#) on 2 oil tankers (the *Kokuka Courageous* and the *Front Altair*) in the Gulf of Oman (near the Straits of Hormuz) on June 13, I had this strange feeling of déjà vu ..., writes Susan Pashkoff. I was only 4 years old when the incident at the [Gulf of Tonkin](#) happened in 1964 and the [truth](#) about the incident was not confirmed until much later, but it is not the first time that the US government used a [supposed attack on its fleet](#) to escalate its military presence and create a war, as it did over this incident and Vietnam.[i]

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The wreckage of The Maine in Havana Bay, 1898 - a key incident in the Spanish American war.

I remember even the cursory examination of the Spanish American War I was taught in school; where the assumption was that the sinking of [The Maine](#) in Havana Bay in 1898 was a result of Spanish actions - though no proof was ever found. [ii] I also remember the discussion of [Yellow Journalism](#) and the Yellow Press associated with the Spanish American war; but that is a far less relevant discussion now as the vast majority of news today bears a strong resemblance to what newspapers were criticised for at the end of the 19th century.

I do not know whether George Santayana's saying "Those that do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it" or Karl Marx's "History repeats itself, first as tragedy, second as farce" are more useful in this context. Thinking about it further, this type of war mongering nonsense is not farcical in the least, so I will go with Santayana this time. The loss of life and the general destruction in the justification of US imperialist actions is not farcical. It most certainly isn't funny for the people of Iran or even its government (this is clear from repeated denials of responsibility) facing the sabre rattling of Donald Trump and their old pal John Bolton.

While these weren't US ships involved, we are certainly hearing the build-up to yet another attempt at US sponsored regime change.

Some major differences between 1898, 1964 and now relate to the media; newspapers (e.g., [The](#)

[Washington Post](#), [The Independent](#)) and TV reporting in the US and Britain (e.g., [NBC](#), [Bloomberg](#), and [CBS](#)) have already questioned the claims or “explanations” of the US government. We are no longer dependent upon news sources only serving the interests of either the state or multinational corporations. This time the actual [captain](#) (or owner depending on the reports) of one of the vessels (the Kokuka Courageous) has raised [inconsistencies](#) between the US “explanation” of what has happened and what they experienced.

Perhaps what has helped this time is the incompetence of US claims, a shadowy and distorted film of Iranian “Revolutionary Guards ”[removing a “mine”](#) from the Kokuka Courageous. Really, if you are going to concoct “evidence” at least make certain that it is watertight (excuse the pun). We are not in a situation of a declining empire (Spain) of 1898 whose land we can steal, nor the presence of “military advisers” embroiled in a revolutionary war in Vietnam and fears of an “evil Communist plot” and threatened [domino effect theories](#).

Trump’s abrogation of the [Nuclear Agreement](#) with Iran negotiated by Obama and other world leaders has set the stage for this situation; the fact that many of the US’s allies have not jumped on board in support of Trump’s decision is telling. Moreover, Trump’s sending of military vessels and troops to the area following [other attacks](#) in [Fujairah](#) (also attributed to Iran) in May seems very convenient.

[John Bolton](#)’s long-term fantasies of regime change in Iran have also raised scepticism. But perhaps it is President Donald Trump facing serious discussions of impeachment and in search of something that will win him popular support that has raised questions among many world leaders.

There is the bizarre claim of the [danger to American interests](#); thus identifying a threat to the oil industry as such a threat. The proximity of part of the “evil Iranian regime” to the Straits of Hormuz and the Gulf of Oman seems to disturb a number of NeoCons and many members of the American government. It is not as though Iran can move itself – hence the fantasies of NeoCons of regime change. Or is it to serve the interests of their buddies running Saudi Arabia? Might it be a number of issues converging including Trump’s worries about his popularity and a potential impeachment?

The attacks have unsurprisingly led to a [2.2% increase](#) in oil prices (Reuters reports [4% price](#)) which will thrill the oil industry, following from years of [oil price depression](#) due to deliberate overproduction and fears of [decrease in oil demand](#) forecasted due to worldwide environmental concerns.

If war occurs on the basis of such ridiculous claims despite inconclusive evidence we will be plunged into a war whose purpose is to uphold not only Trump’s waning popularity and Bolton’s NeoCon fantasies but American imperialism itself.

Whither Britain?

While one expects little of the US government, we are reminded once again that we can expect little from the British Tory government. While [world governments](#) and the [UN](#) have been saying that we need conclusive evidence before blame is placed on Iran (clearly their denials are irrelevant), the same cannot be said for what remains of what passes for a British government.

Current Prime Minister Theresa May is solely serving in a caretaker role pending the outcome of the Tory leadership election. Britain is falling into a constitutional crisis due to both the length of the Parliament ([the longest since the English Civil War](#)) and the fact that the Tories do not have a majority. The government is being propped up by the Democratic Unionist Party. The [appalling](#)

[results](#) for the Tories at the elections to the EU Parliament (they were not great for Labour either, but that is another story), the dangers that their Remainers will vote for the Lib Dems and the Leavers will vote the Brexit party makes one wonder whether this is a legitimate government at all.

The insistence of so many of the leadership contenders on [fantasy solutions](#) to the Brexit problem has not helped the situation; the Tory party is broken and Brexit that has broken it. With [Ken Clarke](#) and [Dominic Grieve](#) (among others) threatening to bring down the government through a vote of no confidence if it moves towards a no deal Brexit, how long can this Government last!? If, and unfortunately, that is a big if, all Labour MPs supported a vote of no confidence, it only needs 6 Tories to support it. The situation feels like a never-ending nightmare ...

Trying to [avoid a General Election](#) at all costs (as they will certainly lose power), Theresa May resigned provoking the leadership contest. It looks pretty definite that that buffoon Boris Johnson will win as he looks certain to top the MPs vote and is the darling of the 124,000 (the figure from March 2018) grassroots members of the Tory party. The only uncertainty relates to whether Johnson will say something stupid as he is well known for his racist, misogynist, and Islamophobic gaffes. But governing the country with insufficient numbers to pass legislation is not governing. The hard reality is that the Conservative and Unionist Party does not have the numbers to govern irrespective of whatever policy declarations Theresa May makes

But if you think that reality would stop the members of the British government from issuing stupid comments, you need to think again. Rather than follow the statements of the UN, EU and other world leaders, the Foreign Secretary [Jeremy Hunt](#) said he believed the evidence of Iranian culpability. After all what does the special relationship mean besides supporting the US government?

His statement includes:

“Following our own assessment the UK concludes that:

It is almost certain that a branch of the Iranian military – the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps – attacked the two tankers on 13 June. No other state or non-state actor could plausibly have been responsible.

There is recent precedent for attacks by Iran against oil tankers. The Emirati-led investigation of the 12 May attack on four oil tankers near the port of Fujairah concluded that it was conducted by a sophisticated state actor. We are confident that Iran bears responsibility for that attack.”

Foreign Office Statement

The fact that Jeremy Hunt is running for the Tory Leadership, coming second to Boris Johnson, but way behind him in the first round is clearly relevant here.[iii] He is trying to show his fidelity by bending knee to the US government. And of course, right-wing Tory Atlanticists believe the US will save them with a trade treaty in Britain’s hour of need – like the scene in that ridiculous movie Independence Day where the British army officer exclaims “Thank God, the Americans have arrived”

The position of Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn that the evidence of Iranian culpability was [not credible](#) and that the government’s response would [increase the probability of war](#); that Britain should be working to ease tensions rather than escalate the move towards war was dismissed as

[“pathetic and predictable”](#) by Jeremy Hunt. Hunt added:

“From Salisbury to the Middle East, why can he never bring himself to back British allies, British intelligence or British interests ([Guardian](#))?”

Adding his two pence, another Tory leadership contender and Hard Brexiteer Dominic Raab (the former Brexit secretary who didn't seem to understand that Britain was an island and so much trade came through [Calais](#). He thinks that feminists are “[obnoxious bigots](#)” - and has [refused to rule out prorogation](#) of Parliament to get a no-deal Brexit) tweeted:

[“Yet again Jeremy Corbyn allows his anti-American prejudice to skew his moral compass and political judgment.#notfittolead.”](#)

Hunt accused Corbyn of virulent anti-Americanism (you can read the chorus in the [Daily Mail](#)) ... in many senses having a chorus is appropriate as it feels as we are living in a Greek tragedy ... whatever happened to your best friend telling you that you are being an arse!? If you expect that in modern day British politics, you have not been following

...

I've not mentioned the BBC's reporting on the tanker attack; there is a reason for this ... they have essentially ignored the mounting conflicting evidence and simply keep on propping up the [US government's position](#) telling us what the [Saudi](#) government thinks, [speculating on what Iran's motives are](#) it is almost surreal ... you would never know that there was conflicting information if you go to the [BBC](#) and search for tanker attacks in Gulf of Oman (this was the case as of 20:48 tonight, British time) ... even for the BBC and the decline of the quality of its reporting, this is strange. Reality and rationality has been tossed out the window along with investigative journalism.

Corbyn caution correct

But in fact, Corbyn's caution is absolutely right. We must oppose this headlong rush to yet another adventure in US imperialism. The British government is barely functional, yet we seem to be cheerleaders in a war with Iran due to our slavish allegiance (and dependence) on the US. Accepting being a junior partner in this alliance with the US is one thing; marching in line towards another misadventure is quite another.

I am really hoping that this stupidity can be stopped or the next chorus of “Remember the Kokuka Courageous and the Front Altair” will be an epitaph on the graves of Iranian civilians adding yet another imperial stupidity to the long list of British government and military interventions. Will supporting (or even worse participating) in a war on Iran be the final straw in the collapse of the Tory Party or do they think it will save their collective arses? Perhaps they think that Thatcher's war with Argentina ([Falkland/Malvinas War](#)) was so successful in keeping her in power that at this point they have nothing to lose...

Susan Pashkoff

[Sign](#) this petition

Notes

[i] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gulf_of_Tonkin_incident

[ii] <http://www.ushistory.org/us/44c.asp>

[iii]

<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/ng-interactive/2019/jun/13/conservative-leadership-election-full-results>

P.S.

• Posted on 17th June 2019 :

<http://socialistresistance.org/attacks-at-sea-lessons-from-us-history/17260>