

Gen. Soleimani Killing: Lessons for African Leaders

In case anyone has forgotten, here is a friendly reminder: Uncle Sam is not your uncle. He is not even your friend.

Former British Prime Minister Harold Wilson is quoted to have once said that a week is a long time in politics. In the complicated maze that is America's foreign policy, even a day is way too long, a year or five being an eternity.

In 2014 a murderous terrorist outfit named ISIS was ravaging Iraq and Syria, cutting off heads of western hostages and videotaping the orgy. The group was not just killing in Iraq and Syria. It proved it has capacity to strike soft targets across Europe using its radicalized ideologues to kill people on streets, in restaurants, at music concerts and running over carnival goers with heavy-duty vehicles. There were attacks from Paris to Brussels to London, and California and Florida, with hundreds of more plots being foiled elsewhere. The sheer scale of the violence scared the hell out of policy makers and political leaders across western capitals.

ISIS, itself an indirect creation of American adventurism with its 2003 invasion of Iraq, wouldn't have been easy to defeat (it's far from certain that the outfit is completely defeated, but that's a story for another day. Right now it's safe to say the group is decimated at least in Iraq and Syria, home to its self-declared caliphate) without Maj General Qasem Soleimani, the flamboyant commander of Iran's Quds Force, their special forces. General Soleimani poured financial and military resources of Iran into Iraq, supporting Shia Militias in Iraq and deploying his own revolutionary guard units in Syria. The casualties inflicted on Iranians were heavy, taking pressure off Americans who didn't need to put too many boots on the ground—allowing them to support the fight from the air with

their technologically advanced equipment. So the enemies had found a common enemy, and had tacitly agreed to tolerate each other.

After the fight was over, however, the 2 regional rivals went back to the drawing board. America had no more use for Soleimani, who they knew would continue supporting proxies to endanger their interest in the region, so they killed him.

It's the same thing they did with the Kurds who, after losing about 10,000 of their fighters fighting ISIS, were thrown under the bus by withdrawing their protective cover over them, essentially inviting the Kurds arch-enemy, Turkey, to hit them.

Don't forget that America and Osama Bin Laden used to be friends in the 1980s when the still unknown Saudi cleric was doing them a favor by fighting the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

How Soleimani, a military strategist and, some would say, credibly, terrorist, who had been a thorn in America's flesh for decades by arming dangerous proxies who attacked America's interests in the Middle East, could not see America targeting him, and just strolled into Iraq days after his people attacked the U.S. embassy, is beyond me. He might have overestimated his importance (*they can't kill me because the Middle East would go up into flames*). He forgot that there's a crazy Molotov cocktail in the White House who is neither rational nor strategic. Trump's buffoonish character has made many of America's enemies to underestimate him and what he is capable of. Trump is like the Joker in the new box office shattering movie. A clown, but one who is dangerous. One of dangers of having someone with no military or government experience like Trump at the helm of such a superpower is that the different factions in his inner circle can easily hold sway over him in decision making. Obama or JFK or George Bush would question and veto military advice. Trump is brash, and

not very knowledgeable about world affairs, and he will likely go for the most grandiose, devastating option, something akin to the grandeur of his Trump-branded hotels. Gen. Soleimani clearly missed these obvious Trumpian cues.

There are few countries that give credence to the adage that 'there are no permanent friends or permanent enemies' than America with its foreign policy approaches. In case any country has forgotten, here is a friendly reminder: Uncle Sam is not your uncle. He is not even your friend. When push comes to shove in as far as his interests are concerned, he will dump you. Or kill you. Or both.

Many countries in Africa are self-identified U.S. 'allies' and in diplomatic platitudes both sides refer to each other as 'friend'. Both sides however know the truth and in private trash talk each other, and they know the reality of U.S. – Africa relations is one based on *give and take* dynamics. An African president who blindly thinks he is so beloved in Washington that he can't be taken out is a stupid one. Which is why those that have managed to survive U.S. imperialism the longest are those that have mastered the art of properly playing Russian roulette with their relations with the U.S.

Africa's takeaways from U.S.-Iran crisis

As far as I can tell, only South Africa's ruling African National Congress party has so far issued an official statement on the killing of General Qasem Soliemani. ANC secretary-general Ace Magashule described the airstrike against Soliemani as an attack on the people of Iran

"The ANC and all progressive formations of the world cannot afford to remain silent while the actions of the US appear to be undermining peace and security with impunity – a clear and deliberate erosion of Iran's national stability," Magashule said.

"We urge the nations of the world, through the United Nations,

to act firmly and expeditiously against this act of international terrorism. We urge all parties to this conflict to give peace a chance. We appeal for maximum restraint”

He added: “The ANC rejects this raw aggression against the people and government of Iran, which has the potential to plunge the Middle East and the world into a full-scale war.”

Granted, Iran and South Africa have a long historical and bilateral relationship both economically and politically that date back to apartheid years, when Iran severed official relations with South Africa’s apartheid regime in 1979 and imposed a trade boycott in protest against the country’s apartheid policies.

Iran however has these same relationships with multiple other African countries, most of them anchored in a shared history of fighting against colonialism, a fight that was largely embedded in both sides’ liberation movements. Iran trades with several African countries and maintains diplomatic presence in many of them. The cooperation ranges from commercial trade to nuclear expertise. Even if the scale of these ties aren’t that extensive (say compared to China), it still means that if the killing of General Soleimani were to lead to a war between Iran and the U.S., the reverberations of such a conflict would be felt even on the African continent. When North Korea was sanctioned by the UN, lots of poor African countries that still relied on its rudimentary weapons and military training [felt the pinch](#) when they were forced to cut ties. Currently, some African countries have their citizens working all sorts of jobs in the Middle East, including Iraq which is expected to be the theater of the potential clash between the two rivals. This means a number of African lives and livelihoods will immediately be in jeopardy. In Somalia where a handful of countries maintain troops as part of AMISOM, the rivalry between rich Shia and Sunni states such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, etc, have been known for a while. A possible conflict is likely to extend there as well.

And yet only South Africa's ruling party (not the government by the way – big difference) could dare say something on an event that is likely to have consequences that are so far-reaching as to impact many African countries. Why? Well you would have to follow the money.

It is hard to overestimate the significance of the amount of American aid flooding most sub-Saharan African states.

Every year America allocates just under 1% of its annual budget, about \$30 billion last financial year, to foreign aid. But how it allocates this money is the bigger story:

25% of UN budget is still footed by Americans. Aid to WFP, FAO, UNICEF, etc is dominated by US aid. That means that most of the emergency relief projects you see being done 'by UN' are, in actuality, America footing the bill. That's also the reason the U.S. retains the right to hire heads of some of these agencies, who end up being Americans (like WFP).

Globally in 2017, the United States spent over \$46 billion in foreign aid. Over 38.5% of that budget went to just ten countries:

1. Afghanistan (\$4.89 billion)
2. Iraq (\$3.36 billion)
3. Israel (\$3.18 billion)
4. Jordan (\$1.38 billion)
5. Ethiopia (\$943 million)
6. South Sudan (\$922 million)
7. Kenya (\$899 million)
8. Pakistan (\$892 million)
9. Nigeria (\$644 million)
10. Uganda (\$608 million).

In terms of regions, the Middle East and North Africa receive the most of the economic assistance.

The Sub-Saharan Africa region receives \$US1.2 billion–25.32

per cent of the budget.

In terms of security aid, however, the countries receiving the most help are:

- Afghanistan (\$US5 billion)
- Israel (\$US3.2 billion)
- Iraq (\$US1.3 billion)
- Egypt (\$US1.3 billion)
- Syria (\$US541,500,000)
- Jordan (\$US364,200,000)

So there you have it. You can't be spending this amount of money just for benevolent reasons. America considers foreign aid as part of its national security strategy. Regardless, America, by and large, has done a lot of good in Africa with its aid. (My favorite of their aid is the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, PEPFAR—a brainchild of George W. Bush, which to me is the best use of American money in history. God knows how many Africans would be dead if not for that grant)

But As everyone knows, there's no such thing as a free lunch. When it comes to America's lunch, this saying is even truer, both metaphorically and literal. You have to be a client state in return. In 2017 when the U.S. moved its embassy to Jerusalem and suffered a veto at the UN with many poor African countries voting for it, Trump [threatened](#) to cut their aid, a threat that forced some of the countries to rescind their vote.

America has historically hit hard erstwhile allies who have become 'stubborn.' Assassinations, funding of protests, disruptions of governments, etc.

This is a lesson to those African leaders that didn't know already: You have to sleep with one eye open in your relations with Uncle Sam.