Trump’s Wag the Dog Response to Iran

January 5, 2020

Are we witnessing the paradigm case of rhetorical projection and deflection? It is hardly a surprise that when we awoke Friday morning the media were not talking about impeachment and Ukraine, the major headlines of prior weeks. The story now has changed suddenly and dramatically.

As a scholar of political communication for over 40 years, I don’t think I am being a cynic to suggest that the timing of Trump’s order on Thursday to kill Qasem Soleimani, the top Iranian General, which is tantamount to a declaration of war, is far from a coincidence. Wouldn’t we be naïve to assume that this President is reticent to use war as a political strategy—to change the narrative and rhetorically extricate himself from the new and mounting evidence about his inappropriate and illegal actions in Ukraine?

After all, Trump is the rhetorical master of deflection and projection—of constantly shifting the topic and doing precisely what he has accused others of doing; for example, on numerous occasions in the past he wrongly predicted that President Obama would attack Iran in order to get reelected. It’s time to acknowledge the recurrent and knee-jerk pattern of Trump’s discourse—something dating back to his responses
to charges of wrong doing well before becoming President of the United States.

Failure to recognize his rhetorical strategy and to understand we have a Chief Executive without a disciplined and well thought out approach to foreign policy and national security will be costly, this time leading to the increased shedding of blood both abroad and at home, sudden terrorist retaliation, cyberattacks, as well as dangerous instability around the world.

Rick Cherwitz,
Austin, TX