

History's lesson for the Iranian conflict

The current Iranian conflict reminds me of the second Punic War (218 B.C. – 201 B.C.). Sure these conflicts have major differences; most notably, the Iranian

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conflict is smaller and hopefully will be much shorter. But the conflicts are still similar in two ways.

First, in both conflicts, the invading power won decisive military victories. In the second Punic War, Carthage

invaded Rome. Its famous general Hannibal crossed the Alps into Italy and defeated Rome in a series of battles. His most famous victory was in Cannae. Hannibal's army was outnumbered 2 to 1 and the battlefield had no landscape that he could use to his strategic advantage. Hannibal overcame these disadvantages by adopting a superior tactic that is still being taught in military academies today. Hannibal made the Romans believe that the center of his army was being routed. The center of Hannibal's army kept retreating and Rome's army rushed into the vacated space. But by collapsing the center of his army, Carthage outflanked the Roman army on both sides. And with that superior positioning on the battlefield, Car-

thage's army began to slaughter Roman troops.

Rome was convinced that it could not defeat Carthage in an open battle. Carthage had the world's most able general. It had Numidian horsemen that were the best cavalry in the world. It also had terrifying war elephants. Faced with such a frightening enemy, Rome's army just shadowed Hannibal's army, harassing it but never engaging it in a full-scale battle.

Similarly, Iran was no match for the U.S. military. The U.S. wiped out Iranian air defenses in just a few weeks. The U.S. could bomb Iran at will. Iran was reduced to just harassing the US and its neighbors. It launched missiles and drones at U.S. bases, at ships passing through nearby waters, and at oil facilities in other Arab countries.

The two conflicts, separated by millennia, are similar in another way – the invading armies were unable or unwilling to do what it would take to win the war. Carthage did not have the equipment to lay siege to Rome. It ended up roaming the Italian countryside for almost 15 years. Rome ended up sending armies to capture Carthage's possessions in what is now Spain and to lay siege to Carthage, which forced Hannibal to leave Italy to help protect his homeland. Carthage gave up so much in the

peace treaty that it was never a great power again.

In much the same way that Carthage could not take the city of Rome, the U.S. is unwilling and perhaps unable to take the Iranian capital of Tehran. You can already see that Iran is following Rome's example. It is stretching out the conflict until the aggressor (the U.S.) gets tired and leaves. It is harassing the enemy by shooting at ships trying to pass through the Strait of Hormuz. It is bringing the conflict to other regions. Just as Roman armies went to Spain, Iranian missiles are hitting targets throughout the Middle East.

While Hannibal was a great general, Carthage never should have attacked Rome because it did not have a path to success – because it could not lay siege to the city. In much the same way, the U.S. probably should not have attacked Iran if it was not willing to launch a land invasion. Iran will just wait us out. History is on their side. However, I do have to qualify my argument a bit. The U.S. bombing did set the Iranian nuclear program back. Whether this benefit is lasting or was worth the cost of the conflict will be a question for historians to debate many years from now after we see what happens.

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