

Why has Greta Thunberg got so many people riled?

The 16-year-old climate change activist has been inundated with abuse from those who should know better

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The fictional master detective Sherlock Holmes once said: "You know my method. It is founded upon the observation of trifles." Then there is his most famous observation: "When you have excluded the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth."

With the great detective in mind, I've been puzzling over a modern mystery: why do some people actively loathe Greta Thunberg? She is the 16-year-old Swedish activist who is trying to save the world from climate change. Ms Thunberg has inspired schoolchildren all over the world to protest in the Fridays for Future movement. The idea is to shake powerful people out of their lethargy – or blatant ignorance – over climate change.

Last Friday, she demonstrated with American students at the White House. She has been honoured with Amnesty International's ambassador of conscience award for 2019, putting her alongside previous recipients such as Nelson Mandela, Malala Yousafzai and the Chinese artist Ai Weiwei. So why does she inspire such rancour?

For example, she travelled from Europe to the US to attend the coming Climate Action Summit in New York on a zero-carbon yacht, choosing to sail across the Atlantic rather than fly. The point was obvious: air travel is bad for

the planet. It was a fortnight's crossing in hurricane season, during which she suffered seasickness. Yet some sniffed that it was mere gesture politics, even if it was for a good cause. Some of the critics went much further. A contributor to the right-wing US TV channel Fox News, Steve Milloy, a former member of the Donald Trump transition team, ranted that Ms Thunberg was an "ignorant teenage climate puppet". Mr Milloy is a strong supporter of the US fossil fuel and tobacco industries. Another middle-aged critic is the British businessman Arron Banks. He helped bankroll the British Brexit referendum in 2016. Mr Banks, who is more than three times older than Ms Thunberg and has two daughters, tweeted: "Freak yachting accidents do happen in August", comments which were reported to Twitter and were described as "vile" by a British MP. Mr Banks claimed he was merely joking. Another 50-something, British radio host and former journalist Julia Hartley-Brewer, tweeted: "Hi Greta, I've just booked some long haul flights for my family to enjoy some winter sun on the beach this Christmas. Level of guilt being felt: 0%."

Which brings us back to Holmes and the "observation of trifles". Why would these apparently secure, established middle-aged adults troll a teenager who cares about her – and our – future? Stumped for answers, I spoke



Swedish environment activist Greta Thunberg speaks at a climate protest outside the

to environmental campaigner verbal attacks for his views. He and columnist George Monbiot explained that such abuse could not. He himself is no stranger to be rooted in shame or guilt. The

Despite John Bolton exit, don't expect thaw in

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With US national security adviser John Bolton having recently departed the White House, the question being asked is whether president Donald Trump will decide to soften the hardline approach taken by his administration in dealing with an uncertain world or if he will stay the course.

It is hard to determine whether Mr Bolton resigned or was dismissed. Either way, the vacuum left by his exit might give the mercurial president a free hand to intervene in matters regarding foreign policy that could have profound consequences. Regardless of their differences or Mr Bolton's quirks, he did manage to protect his boss from making mistakes while guaranteeing consistency in US foreign policy. But with him gone, will there be shifts in American behaviour towards Iran, Afghanistan, Venezuela and North Korea?

The two men had been divided on how to deal with the world at large. Mr Trump places great emphasis on the art of deal-making for he views himself as a good negotiator but his brand of deal-making applies more to the business world than it does to foreign affairs. Brokering deals requires flexibility and Mr Bolton proved an obstacle in this regard because he valued consistency and toughness even more.

That said, one country towards which Mr Trump is unlikely to change his robust policy is Iran.

Thus far, he has avoided military strikes against the regime, despite concerns Tehran has been accumulating ballistic mis-



Donald Trump and Emmanuel Macron have divergent views on how to deal with Iran given the present circumstances.

siles, which prompted Mr Trump to shred the 2015 nuclear deal struck by his predecessor. While maintaining effective sanctions against the Iranian regime, as well as against militia groups it sponsors in the Middle East – including Hezbollah in Lebanon – Mr Trump has now signalled an openness to talk to Iranian President Hassan Rouhani in the hope of reaching a more comprehensive deal than the one Barack Obama secured.

Given that he is up for re-election next year, Mr Trump will

be determined not to be dragged into a war with the Iranians. But securing a grand bargain with the regime will be a daunting challenge for his administration.

In response to the recent US pull-out, the Iranian regime has threatened to withdraw from the 2015 deal altogether and resume its nuclear activities. This is seen as a way to push the European parties to the deal to come up with ways to circumvent US sanctions while at the same time applying pressure on Mr Trump to soften his stance. This tactic has

worked to the extent that the US president has expressed a willingness to talk.

France, meanwhile, offered Iran access to \$15 billion in credit to stave off economic collapse, if Tehran returns to the terms of the deal and negotiates over security issues, including its regional policies. However, according to a source in Washington, the US has made it clear to French President Emmanuel Macron that his plan is unacceptable. The US reportedly told Mr Macron that it does not need him "to build a

bridge" between Washington and Tehran, just for the sake of having a sit-down with the Iranian leadership.

There have been suggestions that a US-Iran meeting is possible on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly meeting late this month in New York. The US sees this as an opportunity for dialogue but will not lift sanctions just to entertain the notion of having talks. That puts the US at odds with the position expressed by Mr Rouhani, who has insisted on the lifting of sanction

President Donald Trump is not likely to be dragged into a war, but robust policy towards Tehran is expected to continue