

Iran to Even the Nuclear Score with the US

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It is going to be 30 years in another six months since the USS Abraham Lincoln, named in honour of the 16th US President, was commissioned on Nov.11, 1989 as the 5th Nimitz-class aircraft carrier of the American Navy. Now, as it leaves Croatia and heads toward the Persian Gulf, the carrier would have mixed emotions.

Its finest moment in all of these thirty years came on a sunny day off the coast of San Diego on May 1, 2003, when the then commander-in-chief President George W. Bush landed on its deck in the co-pilot's seat of a Navy fighter jet to give a "thumbs-up" sign and declare victory in the war in Iraq.

"Major combat operations in Iraq have ended," Bush said, the infamous "Mission Accomplished" banner hovering over him. "In the battle of Iraq, the United States and our allies have prevailed," the C-in-C declared.

Sixteen years later, USS Abraham Lincoln is going back to the Persian Gulf in atonement — to confront the real winner of the Iraq War and US' number one enemy, Iran. The irony of this improbable moment cannot be lost on the 5000-odd men and women on board the carrier when the US National Security Advisor John Bolton announced their new deployment at 9.30 pm on Sunday. The statement said,

"In response to a number of troubling and escalatory indications and warnings, the United States is deploying the USS Abraham Lincoln Carrier Strike Group and a bomber task force to the U.S. Central Command region to send a clear and unmistakable message to the Iranian regime that any attack on United States interests or on those of our allies will be met with unrelenting force. The United States is not seeking war with the Iranian regime, but we are fully prepared to respond to any attack, whether by proxy, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, or regular Iranian forces."

Bolton didn't go into specifics. To be sure, the sudden announcement — unusual for a Sunday and extraordinary for its timing at 9.30 pm — has triggered speculation. However, Tehran has taken Bolton's words in its stride, dismissing them as "psywar". One plausible explanation seems to be that [8th May happens to be the first anniversary](#) of the announcement by President Trump on the US' withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal and the fact of the matter is that the anniversary highlights three things.

First, the US and a clutch of Middle Eastern allies aside, the international community has continued to support the Iran nuclear deal. The US' stark isolation is visible. Second, the US'

punitive sanctions against Iran have taken a heavy toll on the latter's economy. Growth has stagnated while people face numerous privations in day-to-day life. Three, notwithstanding the above, there are no signs of Tehran changing its policies to compromise with the US' regional strategies.

Importantly, Tehran has also let it be known that on the anniversary date on May 8, President Hassan Rouhani will announce its retaliatory actions against the US withdrawal from the nuclear deal. The Tehran Times, which reflects establishment views, quoted "sources" to the effect Iran proposes to jettison some of the limitations on its nuclear activities (which had been suspended under the 2015) agreement. Specifically, the report goes to explain, that while Tehran as of now does not intend to quit the nuclear deal (although discarded by Washington), it will take measured steps within the ambit of articles 26 and 36 of the 2015 agreement.

Tehran has already notified the European Union (which, along with UK, France and Germany, is a signatory of the agreement) of its intention. An urgent meeting of the so-called Joint Commission (E3+EU3) is due to take place in Brussels today with Iran's deputy foreign minister and chief negotiator Abbas Araghchi. This is as per article 36 of the nuclear deal, which prescribes the modalities of arbitration. (The [Tehran Times report is here](#).)

Meanwhile, Tehran is mulling over the options available to it. An influential Iranian strategic thinker who is close to the power circles in Tehran and used to be a spokesman for Iran's nuclear negotiators in the past, Seyed Hossein Mousavian, wrote in the Middle East Eye on Monday about the growing perception in Tehran that the White House is "laying siege to Iran in ways similar to the way the Bush administration did as it prepared to wage an illegal war against Iraq.

Mousavian warned,

"With the US constantly increasing sanctions and pressures, with other world powers failing to provide assurances for the JCPOA's (Iran nuclear deal) economic benefits, Iran's patience is running out. It is left with two options: A gradual withdrawal from the JCPOA or an immediate departure from Non-proliferation Treaty and the JCPOA simultaneously."

Mousavian concludes:

"Both options are risky. The possibility of military confrontation exists in both options, but the latter is more effective because the United States will no longer be able to use the NPT as an instrument against Iran. In return, withdrawing from the NPT will bolster Iran's position on the negotiation table more than ever by giving it more bargaining power."

Ambassador Mousavian's [opinion piece is here](#).

Significantly, there have also been reports recently that Iran's Foreign Minister Javad Zarif is planning to visit North Korea.

Of course, with its back pushed against the wall, Trump administration is leaving Iran with no choice but to retaliate. (The question of capitulation to US bullying simply does not

arise.)

Now, if Iran quits the NPT, it has nothing to lose in the prevailing circumstances where its integration into the international community is in any case blocked by the US sanctions. On the other hand, without Iran's inclusion, the roof the nuclear non-proliferation architecture will collapse overnight.

Suffice to say, Tehran is forcing the international community to push back at the Trump administration and restore the status quo ante in regard of the 2015 deal. But the Europeans have neither the political will nor the capacity or grit to measure up to Iran's expectations.

The US knows it. Thus, a flashpoint is arising. Clearly, Iran will not precipitate any military confrontation. But then, Israel is also waiting in the wings to cook up some dirty tricks that leads to a US-Iran conflict. Herein lies the risk.

Having said that, Tehran is betting that Trump himself doesn't want war with Iran. Possibly, Bolton who works for Israeli interests is punching above his weight. But the brinkmanship itself is incredibly dangerous. A US-Iran war is unthinkable, as the consequences will be disastrous not only for both and regionally but also for the world economy and international security. Worse still, Iran does not even threaten US interests directly.

It is highly unlikely that Trump would ever contemplate a replay of the infamous George W. Bush moment aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln. Simply put, Iran is not Saddam's Iraq. In Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan alone, there are 20000 American troops deployed within Iran's missile range.



Source: Indian Punchline

Besides, Hezbollah has comprehensively targeted Israel. Israeli estimates put the number of Hezbollah rockets at anywhere up to 200,000. Read a thoughtful analysis by the Atlantic magazine entitled [The Many Ways Iran Could Target the United States, here](#).

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Featured image: George W. Bush declares victory in Iraq War, USS Abraham Lincoln, San Diego, May 1, 2003)

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