

The US Is Aware the Confrontation with Iran Is over a Large Geographical Area

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US President Donald Trump no longer has any cards to wave in the face of Iran nor any grounds for negotiation. He can only resort to more economic sanctions and wait by the phone for a call from Iran, unlikely in view of Iran's clear decision to reject any negotiations for the time being. Humanitarian discussions, such as the mutual exchange of prisoners, may take place but are totally unrelated to the nuclear deal. Such exchanges can happen between enemies and even between countries at war.

Donald Trump has succeeded in unifying the Iranian internal front to the point that President Rouhani no longer calls the US by name but refers to it as “the enemy” in his recent statements. Rouhani emphasizes that “there is no place for talking with the enemy, only for resistance”. Nevertheless, prevailing tensions are not dissuading countries like Oman, Qatar, Iraq and Switzerland from trying to ease tensions and carry clear messages that the US is not planning to go to war with Iran.

But Iran still insists on its rights: exporting its two million barrels of oil while anticipating partial withdrawal from the nuclear deal unless Europe fills the gap created by the severe US sanctions. Two crucial points that Donald Trump can't pull back from if he wants to avoid losing, politically, on the domestic level, everything he was won in his last years of office from the partisans of Israel. Trump made gifts of property he doesn't own—Jerusalem and the Golan Heights -to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, to attract support from the strong Israeli lobby in the US. This lobby has proven its ability to control key positions in the mainstream media, social media and to influence important decisions and deciders in Washington. Trump needs the lobby's support for his campaign for re-election to a second term in 2020.

Iran has become an important player in Trump's 2020 re-election. Tehran contributed to the failure of President Jimmy Carter, the 39th US President, to be re-elected through the US embassy hostage crisis and his unsuccessful hostage rescue in Iran (compounded by domestic economic difficulties and high interest rates). Trump's “zero Iran oil exports” policy is failing – already China and Turkey have refused to halt oil imports from Iran – and his failure to prevent Iran from moving towards heightened nuclear capability when the 60 day limit expires. These miscarriages will certainly be used by the domestic political enemies of Trump in the next presidential campaign.

Since the Iranian Revolution in 1979, Iran has been weaned on the milk of US sanctions. This has taught Iran to adapt to recessions, find alternatives and increase its economic autonomy, even if these sanctions have been effective in slowing economic growth.

Since Israel's invasion of Lebanon 1982, Iran has invested in its Lebanese, Syrian, Iraqi, Afghan and Yemeni partners. Today Iran is reaping the rewards of this long-standing military and financial support. Through its partners, it has managed to prevent Israel from occupying Lebanon and imposing peace on its own terms, it has prevented the fall of the Syrian government, created a solid relationship with Iraq, supported the Houthis in Yemen and reconstructed its alliance with the Taliban.

Following the al-Fujairah and Aramco attacks, Iran's message to Trump was clear: in any conflict with Iran, the front will not be limited to Iranian geography but will extend over a vast territory orchestrated by Iran and its allies and will expand to Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Afghanistan.

The Al-Fujairah and Aramco attacks benefitted Iran and lessened the chances of war. However, the rocket launched into Baghdad's Green zone (the area where foreign embassies and governmental institutions are located), a mile away from the US embassy, was on balance not helpful to Iran and Iraq. Iran's partners – Asaeb Ahl al-Haq, Hezbollah Iraq, BADR – condemned the rocket launching as “inappropriate, bad-timing and not serving any purpose”. It was launched on a day when the US and Iran were easing tensions and expressing their intention to avoid any military confrontation. Nonetheless, the attack did show how US forces – who have invested 7 trillion dollars in Iraq – are standing on ground that could turn extremely hostile when the time comes (a war or a message sent by Iran).

Iran, an expert in dealing with economic hardship, has today the choice to partially withdraw from the nuclear deal in case Europe doesn't stand up to its commitments and fill the void created by the severe US sanctions. One thing is certain: Trump is doing everything in his power to help Iran fully withdraw from the nuclear deal and become a nuclear country with military capability.

Russian President Vladimir Putin – during a meeting with the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in Sochi – warned that “Russia is [not the fire brigade](#) and cannot rescue everything”.

“Iran is fulfilling all of its obligations. The Americans withdrew and the deal is falling apart. Europe is in no position to do much to save it and compensate Iran. As soon as Iran will pull out, the world will forget how Trump pushed the US out of the deal and instead will blame Iran”, said Putin.

Pompeo is dictating his twelve conditions as though Iran had lost a war. The US must be well aware that Iran cannot compromise or negotiate on any of these conditions, which directly challenge Iranian national security. The US is now aware that Iran believes in its right to nuclear technology for civilian and research purposes; but the development of its missiles is Iran's protection from foreign attacks and support for its allies in the Middle East, and is vital to its existence and defence.

Just as the US has the right to defend itself and have allies in the Middle East, so do Iran and other Middle Eastern countries. The tension between the US and Iran is winding down. The next *rendezvous* will be in less than 60 days, when Europe announces its success or failure in offering Iran what is needed to stop its partial or full withdrawal from the JCPOA and the reduce its prospects of nuclear military capability.

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