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The US Withdrawal JCPOA and the Middle East

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Abstract: European negotiators hoped that the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), or Iranian nuclear deal, could pave the way for further diplomacy to bring about a more normal and peaceful Iranian role in the region. But key regional powers thought it would have the opposite effect. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Israel thought it would allow Iran to entrench its influence over proxy militias across the Arab world, and Iran did nothing to address those fears. Rather than reversing this, however, the undermining or potential erosion of the JCPOA threatens to exacerbate the regional tensions still further. Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Israel have welcomed Trump's withdrawal and the American broader statements of its intent to counter Iranian influence across the region. It is unclear, however, what policy options the United States (U.S.) might use to implement the stated strategy – or if it will do so. The U.S. may lend more support to Saudi Arabia's very different approaches to countering Iran's allies in Yemen (through the heavy use of force) and in Iraq (through engagement and economic diplomacy), but despite the rhetoric, it is unlikely to make the kinds of political or military investments that would transform the balance of power between Iran and its regional rivals. Instead the tensions over Iran's role will play out primarily through regional forces.

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), or Iranian nuclear deal, was only possible because it focused on non-proliferation and not the wider set of issues that divided Iran from its regional neighbours. Yet those issues now threaten to unravel it. Of course, the immediate trigger threatening the deal is a change of administration in the United States (U.S.): a President Hillary Clinton would not have pulled out of the deal. But the general international opprobrium towards Trump should not obscure the fact that virtually all the Republican candidates were critics of the JCPOA. Their views have been heavily influenced by the chorus of opposition from the Washington's key allies in the region, in Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

These regional powers criticised the deal primarily because of what it left out. It did nothing to address Iran's support for non-state armed groups in the Middle East. Nor did it address Iran's ballistic missile programme.[1] Moreover, they took the view – not shared by the negotiators – that leaving these issues out of the deal would allow Iran to think it did not need to change any of its behavior except for the nuclear programme. Regional powers lobbied the U.S. hard on these issues during the negotiations but felt that their complaints fell on deaf ears during Obama's time. As a result, they are celebrating Trump's decision to withdraw. But they do not represent a consensus view across the region; notably, Turkey, which tried a decade ago to broker an earlier agreement on Iran's nuclear programme, has called Trump's decision an unfortunate step, while Egypt is wary of the risks of a wider regional conflict at a time when it is primarily focused on fighting its own Islamist opponents.

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The U.S. withdrawal will not necessarily give the regional critics the results that they want. It would be a logical fallacy to think that because the deal left out these key issues, overturning the deal would ensure that they are now addressed. Instead, addressing those issues would require a new strategy that would deal with Iran's links to Hamas and *Hezbollah*, the Iranian role in Iraq, and Iranian links to the Houthis in Yemen, among other things. It is not clear that the U.S. has such a strategy. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has begun to articulate some of his country's aims, but there remain serious questions about how he intends to achieve them.

The next steps are extremely uncertain; post-deal speculation has touched on every possibility from a regional war to a new and more comprehensive deal. Most likely, the U.S will not be able to achieve a bigger deal, but will also want to avoid a full-scale war. But proxy wars will heat up, and there is a growing risk of direct confrontations between regional powers, as was seen with the brief exchange of fire between Iran and Israel in May.

The background: why key regional powers did not buy in to the JCPOA

A shared opposition to Iran has brought former enemies Israel and Saudi Arabia closer together, along with the UAE. Nonetheless, there are some differences in their opposition to the JCPOA. Israel's prime minister has loudly criticised the JCPOA for having inadequate safeguards against Iran obtaining a nuclear weapon. However, other voices in the Israeli military and security establishment have had a more positive perception of the agreement's contribution to non-proliferation.[2] For Saudi Arabia and the UAE, the issue has been less the possible nuclear threat than Iran's foreign policy. They suspected that the JCPOA reflected a wider strategic change in Western attitudes to Iran, and that this could only be at their expense. A recurring theme in conversations with Saudis about the JCPOA is the sense that Western countries were changing sides and abandoning their traditional allies. This was an exaggerated perception. There has indeed been a growing sense in Western capitals that Iran does not have to be the enemy that the U.S. had deemed it to be since 1979. This did not mean switching sides; rather, Western countries hoped that reducing friction with Iran could contribute to a more peaceful region. But communications between the West and the Gulf countries on the JCPOA have been fraught with mistrust and misperceptions.

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The JCPOA was always intended as a non-proliferation agreement, not as a wider "grand bargain" to normalise Iran's international role. The veto-wielding members of the UN Security Council had very different views on Iran's politics and foreign policy. However, even the countries most friendly to Iran, China and Russia, agreed on the need for a stronger and more credible non-proliferation regime that went beyond the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons provisions, both because of Iran's previous record on nuclear development and given the risks of a wider Middle East nuclear arms race. Reaching this consensus was itself

an achievement at a time when the United Nations Security Council was often deeply divided over most Middle Eastern issues, and above all Syria.

A non-proliferation agreement was never going to resolve the tensions around Iran's role in the region, nor improve Iran's human rights record. But since the international community had spent decades failing to resolve those issues, there was a case for seizing the chance to at least make progress on the nuclear issue. After all, if Iran did obtain nuclear weapons capabilities, there would be even less of a chance to ever make progress on the other issues of concern. The negotiators therefore agreed that the JCPOA negotiations would be separated from questions about Iran's role in the region or Iran's domestic human rights record. However, the European negotiators who worked on the JCPOA argued that the agreement could be a stepping stone to resolving the broader issues that they had with Iran, and that if Iran did not feel a constant sense of existential threat, it could become a more responsible and constructive regional actor.

By contrast, the loudest voices in the region (chiefly Israel, Saudi Arabia and the UAE) say the opposite. They thought that the JCPOA sent a signal to Iran that the international community was ready to recognise it as a legitimate international actor and normalise its role in the region. To them, it signalled the end of U.S. containment of Iran. Rather than paving the way for further constructive engagement to change Iran's behaviour, they saw the JCPOA as the end of any concessions by Iran. In this view, by winding down many of the sanctions, the international community was taking away the pressure that had brought Iran to the negotiating table. They would be left with little leverage to press Iran to change its behavior in the Arab world. The case of Israel was somewhat different from Saudi Arabia. Netanyahu had strong views that the nuclear safeguards in the deal were inadequate, to the extent that the deal was worse than having no deal at all. These views were not shared across the military and defence establishment – there is a far greater structural diversity of views in Israel than in Saudi Arabia or UAE, where it is not practical or permissible to deviate openly from the leader's core policies.

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The period after the JCPOA was signed should have been used as an opportunity to test out the European thesis that it could be a stepping stone to addressing Iran's wider regional role. But this did not happen. Europeans called for Iran and Saudi Arabia to have their own direct dialogue. But this did not materialise, largely because of Saudi objections. And in the absence of a bilateral Iran–Saudi or Iran–Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) process, there was no other systematic effort to address Iran's role in the region. Indeed, serious European engagement with Iran over Yemen has only begun belatedly, in 2018, after both Europe and Iran realised that the United States might really walk away from the nuclear deal. The international and regional powers also had a different calculus on terrorism. At the time the deal was struck, the primary terrorist threats to the international powers were *Sunni* jihadis, not Iranian militias, and Iran was co-operating in fighting the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in Iraq. In this context, regional tensions were exacerbated by a deal that was seen in the region as the beginning of the end of U.S. "containment" of Iran, without any apparent policy to replace it.

The failure of the "grand bargain" approach

A different approach had been considered in the past. In the early 2000s, ahead of the Iraq war, the United States and Iran had communicated indirectly on the idea of a "grand bargain" to normalise relations and to address the causes of their cold conflict. This was in the context of a more reformist government in Iran, and changes in the way the U.S. perceived its interests. *Al Qaeda* had replaced Iran as the primary threat that Americans perceived from the Middle East, and the U.S. was fighting one Iranian enemy, the Taliban, while preparing to remove another, Saddam Hussein.

Strikingly, though, long-running anxieties about the possibility of war did not prevent the Gulf economies from enjoying rapid growth; rather, from 2003 to 2014, the Gulf economies boomed, largely because of the high oil price, driven up in part because of the perceived geopolitical risks to supply

Broadly, the idea was that Iran wanted an end to sanctions and to any attempts at regime change, while the U.S. wanted Iran to transparently show it was not developing weapon of mass destruction (WMD), act decisively against terrorism including *Al Qaida* members on Iranian territory or in Iranian prisons, end its support for Palestinian militants and leave *Hezbollah* simply a political party. In Iraq, the United States wanted Iran to support stabilisation, while Iran wanted the United States to pursue People's Mujahedin of Iran (known as MEK) and to support Iran's claim for war reparations from Iraq. To reach these ends, the United States and Iran would establish three parallel working groups dealing with disarmament, terrorism and regional security, and economic co-operation.

But the grand bargain idea failed. The then U.S. government did not buy into it, and the then-dominant neoconservative camp were advocating military action against Iran – to take place after their decisive victories in Iraq and Afghanistan, which of course never materialised. For the next decade the world lived with near-constant speculation that a U.S. or Israeli attack on Iran might be imminent, and war-gamed scenarios for the regional fallout, until the Obama administration decided to re-engage through a framework that was narrower and more multilateral.

This period prompted extensive cost-benefit analyses of any possible U.S. or Israeli war with Iran. Scenarios for a war with Iran usually pointed to extensive costs for both sides, not only in any direct conflict, but through the variety of regional proxies that Iran can draw on. Thus, scenarios typically considered the risks of a *Hezbollah*-Israel war, attacks on U.S. bases in the GCC and on the power and water infrastructure of the states that hosted them, attacks on U.S. troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, and various detailed scenarios in which Iran might try to close the Strait of Hormuz (though by most analyses this could be quickly reversed, and would also hurt China more than it would hurt the U.S.). These scenarios are now being dusted off and updated.

Most countries in the world wish to avoid such a war. Despite the often-belligerent rhetoric of Israeli politicians, key figures in the Israeli defence and intelligence establishment have repeatedly counselled against a direct or conventional war with Iran, while placing more focus on covert and cyber operations to disrupt its nuclear programme. For the Gulf countries, too, war with Iran would increase the risks of direct Iranian actions against them. Strikingly, though, long-running anxieties about the possibility of war did not prevent the Gulf economies from enjoying

rapid growth; rather, from 2003 to 2014, the GCC economies boomed, largely because of the high oil price, driven up in part because of the perceived geopolitical risks to supply. This oil-price bonus is now being felt again, and it mitigates the generally negative effect of political risk perceptions on the investment climate in the Gulf.

What's next?

The U.S. has said it has a new strategy to confront Iran through "maximum pressure", by increasing sanctions and pursuing Iranian proxies throughout the world[3]. It wants to counter Iranian influence and change Iranian behaviour in the Middle East. Specifically, it wants Iran to end its support to Hamas and *Hezbollah*; its military involvement in Syria; its relations with non-state armed groups in Iraq, its relations with Houthis in Yemen; and Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) training or weapons for militants in the Gulf.[4]

The list of demands has expanded since the "grand bargain" idea of 2003, as Iran's network of regional non-state armed allies has grown. Meanwhile, the United States arguably has less to offer than it did then, since Iran's key demands included an end to sanctions and to threats of regime change, both of which have eased with the JCPOA. In this context, Trump is attempting to re-establish U.S. leverage and use it to press Iran for a broader set of concessions – in its regional policy as well as non-proliferation. One theory is that all this could lead to a new agreement – a Trumpian "grand bargain". Iran did show some flexibility in negotiating elements of a side agreement with the Europeans in early 2018, to increase some of its control over its nuclear programme. But this process was abruptly ended when Trump announced in May that he would pull out of the deal. This moving of the goalposts makes a second deal much harder.

Transatlantic divisions mean Iran will be neither isolated nor integrated

In grappling with these complex issues, U.S. leverage will be constrained by the lack of international support for its JCPOA withdrawal – which is perceived by the other signatories as a unilateral attempt to wreck an agreement that Iran has not breached. The remaining five powers want to keep the deal on life support. They hope that, like the Paris Climate Agreement or the Trans-Pacific Partnership, this multilateral agreement could survive U.S. withdrawal. Transatlantic political differences are particularly acute because of personality politics: Trump is viewed with a mixture of contempt and alarm by many European leaders.[5]

The transatlantic divisions will make it more difficult to develop effective strategies towards the various regional conflicts in which Iran and its allies are involved. Whether on sanctions or any military measures, the United States will need to work closely with Saudi Arabia, UAE and Israel, with little support either from European partners or from some of the other major regional powers such as Turkey or Egypt.

In the immediate future, Iran will be neither isolated nor integrated; it will be half-in and half-out of the international system. The United States is returning to its policy of treating Iran as a rogue state, isolating it and using the combination of sanctions and the implicit threat of war in an attempt to force behaviour change

In the immediate future, Iran will be neither isolated nor integrated; it will be half-in and half-out of the international system. The United States is returning to its policy of treating Iran as a rogue state, isolating it and using the combination of sanctions and the implicit threat of war in an attempt to force behaviour change. At the same time, Europe, Russia and China will be pursuing a policy of

engaging with Iran in the hope they can find a more constructive way to integrate it into the region and the world.

If diplomacy and sanctions are both weakened, questions remain about military scenarios. Trump is unlikely to want a full-scale war, likely to be unpopular with his base. Indeed, even as he talks of maximising pressure on Iran, his initial instincts were to pull U.S. troops out of Syria, which has been the central battleground for the Iran–Gulf proxy conflict – at an enormous cost to Syrians. Most likely, he will want to increase support to regional allies, seeing them as the people who should be at the forefront of countering Iran; here, there may be a mismatch of expectations with some Gulf elites, who may hope that the U.S. will take on a far greater role than it is prepared to do.

Iran's response

The divergent international responses will give Iran more room for manoeuvre in its response to Trump's decision. Indeed, Iran's response to the switch in U.S. policy is one of the key uncertainties here. After all, one of the key international political differences over the JCPOA has been the divergent views over how Iran responds to pressure versus engagement. These views are based on very different readings about the nature of decision-making and threat perceptions inside Iran's political regime. Like many repressive countries Iran is able to read more deeply into the more transparent policy debates in Western democracies than Westerners can read into its own internal dynamics.

At the same time, some political differences between Iran's various political camps and state institutions are visible. Rouhani and his pragmatic-conservative alliance appear more open to compromise on some elements of Iran's foreign policy, if there are other gains to be made, than Qasim Sulimani and the IRGC, who take the lead over Iran's relations with non-state actors and see their regional policy as both vital and successful. There are also questions about the long-term balance of power inside Iran and the nature of its future leadership once the current Supreme Leader passes away.

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For countries who are more sympathetic to Iran, its role in the region is primarily about "forward defence – ensuring it has insurance policies against possible future attacks, so that in those war-game scenarios, it has very visible cards to play to deter would-be attackers. For those that are more critical of Iran, including Saudi Arabia and Israel, it is motivated by expansionism, ideology and a desire for hegemony.

There are elements of both factors. For instance, in terms of support for Hamas and *Hezbollah*, Iran threatened Israel before Israel threatened Iran – because Iran's revolutionary regime styled itself as a defender of a larger Islamic cause in the Palestinian issue, for ideological reasons and to legitimise itself. But now Iran's support for *Hezbollah* has become entrenched for two other reasons. For one, it serves as a means to empower a *Shi'a* minority in an Islamic world that is more sectarianized than it was in the early years of the Islamic republic. From Iran's point of view, it also serves a geopolitical purpose as an instrument of deterrence – through which could also retaliate against Israel if Israel were to attack it.

As another example, Syria has long had an alliance with Iran on the basis of a shared opposition to U.S. and Israeli interests,[6] but

has also taken on geopolitical importance as a corridor for arms from Iran to *Hezbollah*. Since 2011, it has become entangled in a newer type of identity politics as Iran has seen it as a battleground to stop Gulf rivals, as well as the United States, from expanding their influence, and as Iranian officials have portrayed it as a necessary place to confront ISIS and prevent them reaching Iran. Overall, Iran's engagement in proxy conflicts appears to be an attempt to fight its rivals in other people's territory, because it sees this as an alternative to battles that might happen more directly on its own territory.

A key problem is that even though in some cases, Iran may have established its reach into Arab countries because it felt under existential pressure, it will not necessarily retract those positions when that pressure is removed. In 2015–16, Iran had less reason to feel threatened by the U.S. than ever before but did nothing to build confidence with its regional neighbours. Instead it believed it could build confidence with the West through co-operating in the anti-ISIS campaign – and used the focus on ISIS to demonise its neighbours by blaming Saudi Arabia for ISIS ideology.

On balance, Iran would appear to have an interest in maintaining the JCPOA, to continue at least some engagement with the outside world, including Russia, China, and India. Moreover, with the JCPOA still in place, it will be difficult for the United States to build serious international coalitions or UN support for military options against Iran, whereas an Iranian withdrawal from JCPOA could be portrayed as Iran changing its tune on WMD.

The U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA has decisively undermined the economic benefits that the deal can give Iran. Those potential economic benefits were already constrained because investors were aware of the political risks to the deal (and also limited by Iran's own business environment problems), but nonetheless major investments and trade agreements with companies from Total to Boeing are now being canceled.

This also deals a serious and possibly fatal political blow to the Washington's own negotiating partners, who had staked their own reputation on the case for the JCPOA.[7] It will be harder for future Iranian politicians from now on to sell the benefits of diplomacy with the U.S. and Iranian domestic politics are likely to shift towards more hardline forces[8].

In this context, Trump's withdrawal from the deal is in some ways a welcome development for Iranian hardliners. They have always said the United States was not to be trusted. Now they see a chance for the rest of the world to agree with them. For once, they are part of an internationally welcomed, multilateral deal from which the U.S. has unilaterally walked away; like Russia and China, they are enjoying their apparent positioning on the moral high ground, even though the current threats to the deal are in part the result of Iran's failure to resolve tensions with its neighbours.

The next steps for Saudi, the UAE and Israel

Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Israel have publicly welcomed Trump's decision on the JCPOA. They have also welcomed the broader Iran "strategy" that the administration has announced, first in October by the White House[9] and then in more detail by Pompeo in May, because it reflects their own views of Iran as a force that is subverting existing states and destabilizing the region. However, it is uncertain what the United States will actually do (or if it will do much at all) to implement the "strategy" – which has been long on what the U.S. wants, but short on how it would achieve its goals beyond the re-imposition of sanctions. The Gulf countries in particular may overestimate the United

States' willingness and capacity to push back against Iran and its allies in various regional battlefields, while the Trump administration may similarly overestimate the capacity of its regional allies to do this themselves. Reports that the United States wanted to assemble an Arab force to take over the U.S. role in fighting ISIS in Syria point in this direction[10].

As it looks at the role of Iran in Syria as well as Lebanon, Israel appears not so much emboldened by Trump's decision on the JCPOA as it is alarmed by the growth of Iranian ambitions on its borders. Without a clear U.S. strategy for Syria. Israel's key concern is that Iran may seek to build up a long-term military presence in Syria

In their responses to this action, Israel and the Gulf countries will each prioritise their own neighbourhoods. As it looks at the role of Iran in Syria as well as Lebanon, Israel appears not so much emboldened by Trump's decision on the JCPOA as it is alarmed by the growth of Iranian ambitions on its borders. Without a clear U.S. strategy for Syria. Israel's key concern is that Iran may seek to build up a long-term military presence in Syria. In April, former Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak said that the chances of an Iran–Israel war had risen from 1% to 10%. In May, Israel and Iran exchanged direct rocket fire for the first time; after Iran fired missiles at Israel, Israel carried out attacks which it said had destroyed most of Iran's military infrastructure in Syria.

Some Israeli voices have argued that the United States' desire to wind down its presence in Syria indicates a lack of serious commitment to protecting Israel against one of the most important threats it faces. Trump's most pro-Israel policies, moving the embassy to Jerusalem and leaving the JCPOA, are actions that can essentially be taken through announcements, rather than involving the complexities of a long term political and military strategy. In the absence of a clear U.S. strategy for Syria, Russia may play a role in restraining the actors from an inter-state conflict, even as it has contributed to Syria's domestic conflict. It has consistently sought to co-ordinate with Israel and accommodate its security concerns over Syria.

For the Gulf states, by contrast, the immediate focus is Yemen. Saudi-led forces have pushed further towards the Houthi-controlled port of al-Hudaydah in recent weeks, giving them newfound confidence in their military campaign, even if they remain far from taking the capital. As they do so, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi will be seeking further support from the United States. That could include deeper involvement by U.S. special forces in fighting the Houthis and perhaps an eventual push to Sana'a (after reports last year that a small number had helped Saudi to locate and destroy Houthi missiles[11]). U.S. political and military support will also weaken the impact of growing European pressure for a ceasefire.

Iraq is the other priority, as Saudi Arabia sees an opportunity there. Saudi policies to counter Iran in Iraq are in striking contrast with their policies towards Yemen. The *Dawa* party is much closer to Iran than the Houthis. Yet after more than a decade of eschewing relations (to no avail), Saudi Arabia has been engaging with *Dawa*, and with other leading *Shi'a* Islamists including Moqtada Al Sadr, using diplomatic outreach and promises of economic co-operation. This is based on a realisation that Iraqi *Shi'a* have local and nationalist interests that sometimes diverge from Iran, and that many of their politicians are frustrated by Iran's dominance over their political system. This engagement reduces the risks that renewed Saudi–Iran tensions will play out in heightened *Sunni–Shi'a* sectarian tensions everywhere, and it has been welcomed by key Shi'a figures from Gulf Arab states, though critics argue there is a risk

that sectarian chauvinism is being replaced by ethnic (Arab–Persian) chauvinism.
Saudi Arabia can certainly help Iraqi leaders to hedge their bets and balance the influence of Iran, but it is unclear whether it could meet more maximalist goals of bringing Iraq more firmly into its own orbit. Under one scenario, the United States and Saudi Arabia could provide some balance to Iranian influence; under another, a Saudi–Iranian contest for influence could massively deepen divisions. Despite its rhetoric, the United States is unlikely to confront Iran and its allies in Iraq; the territorial victory against ISIS has weakened the sense that the U.S. and Iran share a common enemy, but ISIS is not yet defeated in Iraq, and for now both U.S. and Iranian troops need to co-exist.

A new twist comes from the relative success of the Sadrists in the May elections, albeit with a very low turnout. Sadr is a *Shi'a* Islamist leader who was once close to Iran but has for some years positioned himself as an anti-Iranian nationalist. Saudi Arabia has reached out to him and after the election, the Saudi minister of state for Arab Gulf affairs, Thamer Al Sabhan, praised his "wisdom, patriotism, and solidarity". But Sadr has also been firmly anti-American. Iran will likely try to court him again, as they have traditionally hedged their bets in Iraq, reflecting a greater interest in ensuring their dominance there than in installing any specific party or individual. And there are questions about the depth and credibility of his transformation from a sectarian to a nationalist.

Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Israel are the loudest voices on Iran in the region, but there is a wider spectrum of views. Within the Gulf, others have welcomed the deal, including Dubai. The threat posed to Oman makes it particularly uncomfortable. Turkey, which put forward its own proposal with Brazil to resolve the nuclear issue in 2010, has said Trump's decision is unfortunate. Egypt's views may also be mixed, as it wants to prioritise confronting *Sunni* Islamists, and for this reason has relatively good relations with the Syrian and Russian governments. Relatedly, when Saudi Arabia ratcheted up tensions with Iran over Lebanon last year, Egypt's president Sisi said the region did not need another escalation. For Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen, the countries are deeply divided over the role of Iran; some factions may welcome confrontation but others, especially in Iraq, will fear that it will simply stoke their own internal problems.

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Conclusion

Saudi Arabia, Israel, and the U.S. tend to frame Iranian behaviour in isolation from the broader context of conflict. It is portrayed as "sponsorship of terrorism", "interference" and "destabilizing activity" which needs to be countered and policed. Meanwhile, there is the danger that Iran will be able to conveniently deploy a self-justifying narrative where it is the victim of the whim of an unstable U.S. president, and fail to seriously review the impact of its own regional policies on conflict, state weakness and sectarianism in the region. Those Middle Eastern countries who do have dialogue with Iran need to relay it differently, communicating not only with the foreign ministry but with the national security council and other institutions across the Iranian government.

Ultimately, curbing or ending Iran's support to armed non-state actors requires a strategy to change the context of conflict in which Iran operates – and to address the demand

for Iranian sponsorship, as well as the supply. The conflicts over Iran's role need to be addressed by resolving the various conflicts where Iranian-backed militias play a role but are not the only parties to the conflicts, and by eventually building a better functioning regional security system. European efforts to contribute to peace-building and development in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen will be critical here.

Endnotes

1- The strong international normative and legal consensus around nuclear non-proliferation has no equivalent when it comes to missile proliferation.

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3- US Department of State, 'After the Deal: A New Iran Strategy – Remarks by Mike Pompeo, Secretary of State', Washington, DC, May 2018 ,21
Available at: https://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/282301/05/2018.htm

4- Kuwait recently joined Bahrain and Saudi Arabia in convicting a cell that it said were Iran-trained militants, and while Western governments usually think Bahrain and Saudi Arabia are too prone to point the finger for their domestic problems at Iran, in the years since 2011 the UK and U.S. have corroborated some reports of Iranian arms transfers to Bahraini militants.

5- Another Republican president might have been persuaded of the merits of the "side agreement" that European diplomats had devised to address American concerns in the first few months of 2018 or might have made a more persuasive case to Europe for leaving the deal. As it is, the United States is in a weaker position vis-a-vis Iran than it was before the deal.

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