

Trump's Iran Strategy: The Good, The Bad and The Ugly

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In the past few months, US President Donald Trump made his stance on Iran clear by unequivocally withdrawing from the Iran Nuclear Deal. Now that the United States' stance vis-à-vis Iran is apparent, Ahmad Hashemi breaks down the overall U.S. strategy on Iran into three categories- the good, the bad and the ugly.

BY: AHMAD HASHEMI

From day one, it became clear that countering Iran was going to be President Donald J. Trump's top foreign policy priority. However, two events shed more light on his Iran policy: one, as he promised in his election campaign, President Trump rescinded what he calls "the worst deal ever" on May 8, and walked away from the Iran nuclear deal. Two, in his first major foreign policy speech on May 21, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced a 12-point list of demands coupled with a subtle threat of escalation and confrontation if those demands are not met. While the withdrawal comes as no surprise, it has become clear that the effect of the Iran strategy will have its good, bad and ugly facets.

The Good: Sanctions Over Human Rights Abuses

In the latest round of new sanctions introduced on May 30, the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) **designated two Iranian entities** for committing human rights abuses on behalf of the Iranian government: the militia group Ansar-e Hezbollah and the infamous Evin prison. This was a move that won the consent and admiration of many ordinary Iranians as both entities are among the most hated in Iran. Ansar-e Hezbollah is a political, religious, and paramilitary organization under the direct control of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The group violently suppresses Iranian citizens, disrupts peaceful political gatherings, and attacks dissidents, university students, and street protesters. Another designated entity, the Evin prison, in Tehran, is a well-known detention center for holding and torturing political prisoners, journalists, dissidents, and anti-government activists.

These human rights- related U.S. sanctions were among the most legitimate and appropriate sanctions ever introduced by any US administration against entities affiliated with the Iranian government's machine of repression. Iranians want to get rid of this regime. The international community and the United States can help the Iranian people in their struggle against the tyranny by implementing multilayered economic and political pressures especially by imposing coordinated US-EU sanctions centered on the Islamic Republic's violation of its people's human rights rather than merely focusing on its nuclear or ballistic missile program and walking away from the deal.

The Bad: Possible Escalation to War

The Iranian regime plays a destabilizing role in the Middle East region but this alone cannot be a good reason for the U.S. or any other nation to conduct a military operation and involve themselves in the business of regime change. Previous experiences, especially the example of Iraq, show not only that regime change simply doesn't work but it has the propensity to create more chaos and instability. Iran is no exception and any attempt to militarily attack and force regime change would result in the loss of hundreds of thousands if not millions of lives; flow of millions of refugees to Europe, and exacerbating the instability in Iran and the region.

The Trump administration has not openly talked about a possible "regime change" through military intervention in Iran. However, there are some hawkish elements like John Bolton, Mike Pompeo, and Rudy Giuliani within the administration who, in the past, have advocated for a military attack and forceful regime change in Iraq, Iran, North Korea, and elsewhere. The Pompeo- Bolton- Giuliani triangle's approach toward Iran is similar to their approach during the Bush administration in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Before joining the Trump administration, they have frequently advocated regime change and military attacks on Iran. In 2014, as a Kansas congressman, Pompeo's solution for the Iranian problem was very simple: it would take "**under 2,000 sorties to destroy the Iranian nuclear capacity.**" Likewise, last year on July 2, at an Iranian dissident rally in Paris, John Bolton promised to celebrate the regime's collapse in Tehran before 2019 by saying that the **Iranian regime should not reach its 40th birthday.**

Fed up with almost four decades of living under a reactionary theocracy, Iranian people are yearning for freedom. They definitely need foreign assistance but what they don't want for sure, is another war. Therefore, it is ultimately up to Iranian people to choose their destiny and they will be grateful to have U.S. support in their long journey from current tyrannical theocracy to a democracy.

The Ugly: Banning Iranian Refugees

Persecuted religious, ethnic, and sexual minorities, dissident political activists, and human rights advocates make up the bulk of those Iranians fleeing tyranny and repression in their homeland and seeking a safe place in democratic countries including the U.S. as refugees. By banning Iranian refugees, the Trump administration is punishing the very people who are bearing the brunt of this repressive regime for the bad behaviors of their government. In his speech on May 21, Pompeo mentioned Iranian people several times, expressing concern about their human rights violations by the Iranian regime. However, he didn't mention the bitter fact that Iranian dissidents and activists remain on President Trump's Muslim and refugee ban list. This approach discredits the current administration's claims that it cares about human rights of oppressed Iranian citizens. While there is not even one single case of an Iranian-American individual committing an act of terrorism on U.S. soil, the absurdity of the ugly politics of banning an entire nation is not more evident than in *Silicon Valley*. People like Pierre Omidyar founder of *eBay*, Arash Ferdowsi co-founder of *Dropbox*, Bob Miner co-founder of *Oracle*, Sean Rad founder of *Tinder*, Dara Khosrowshahi, CEO of *Uber*, and hundreds of other loyal hardworking Americans of Iranian descent are proudly serving their new country and calling it home.

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