

TIME TO DEFUSE US-IRAN TENSIONS

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: G20

The United States and Iran appear to be recalibrating their positions after edging closer to the brink over the past few weeks and stoking fears of a conflict that would only exacerbate the already fraught situation in West Asia. Following the attacks on six tankers in regional waters and the shooting down of a US drone, President Donald Trump ramped up the pressure with sanctions while Iran threatened to begin enriching more uranium than it is allowed under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the 2015 nuclear deal. Clearly, Mr Trump's recent revelation that he decided against ordering military strikes on Iran is an indication that the US is evaluating its options for pressuring Iran to return to the table to negotiate a new nuclear deal. There are also indications that Iran may not immediately go ahead with its threat to breach the limits on uranium enrichment following efforts by China and European powers to bypass the US sanctions which have crippled the Iranian economy.

But in a reflection of the lingering tensions, the US last week deployed F-22 stealth jets to Qatar for the first time as part of the build-up of its forces in the Persian Gulf. As part of efforts to address Iran's economic problems, the European Union has said that INSTEX, its mechanism for financial transactions, which will bypass the US sanctions, is operational but it remains to be seen whether this will make companies confident enough to do business again with Iran. More importantly, Iran and its European interlocutors have been unable to find a way to address Tehran's demand for oil exports to be resumed.

India has been among the countries that have been calling on the US and Iran to de-escalate tensions. New Delhi has compelling reasons for its stance; any conflict in the Persian Gulf could affect the more than eight million expatriates in the region and curtail or disrupt energy supplies at a time when the Indian economy cannot afford any shocks. The unilateral actions of the US have succeeded in creating immense pressure on Iran but there has been little buy-in by the Europeans or the Chinese. Even visiting US secretary of state Mike Pompeo's description of Iran as the biggest state sponsor of terror was not endorsed by the Indian side. India, as well as other countries which have stakes in the situation, should now step up their efforts to help bring the US and Iran back to the negotiating table to defuse the tensions.

First Published: Jul 01, 2019 08:54 IST

END

Downloaded from crackIAS.com

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com