

TENSION IN THE PERSIAN GULF

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

The U.S. administration's strategy to counter Iran on the nuclear front is being met with an alleged new strategy that has left the global security community baffled in more ways than one. It is being suggested that shipping vessels be provided naval escorts through the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz, something reminiscent of World War II when most merchant ships would be provided with naval security.

Two oil tankers, one belonging to the Norwegian shipping company Frontline and the other a Japanese vessel, Kokuka Courageous, were sabotaged in the Strait of Hormuz by what the American central command calls limpet mines, apparently manufactured in Iran. Speculation has been rife over who may have conducted such a sophisticated attack in a sea route through which 40% of the world's traded oil passes. The U.S. blames Iran for the sabotage attacks, even releasing videos and photographs of the incident in an attempt to prove Iranian involvement, something Tehran has vehemently denied.

The situation in the Gulf has been brewing for a few months now and there can be multiple ways to read it. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was on a state visit to Tehran, hoping to mediate between the two rivals, when the Japanese tanker was attacked.

To believe either side of the story, without evidence, would be misleading. However, geopolitics in most instances does not come in black or white — rather, it's all grey. The U.S.'s decision to unilaterally pull out of the Iran nuclear deal and impose sanctions on Iran for its nuclear programme has not gone down well with Tehran; the global community too has not appreciated the move. The American side of the story is that Iran is meeting economic and diplomatic manoeuvres with violent attacks by pulling off sophisticated sabotage on the seas. Iranians, on the other hand, proclaim that it is the American intelligence apparatus that is conducting such moves to escalate the situation to the brink of war, thus paving the way for yet another 'promotion of democracy' in West Asia.

Iran has been at the wrong end of American sanctions for decades now, and it has learned to negotiate its way each time with creative new strategies. However, the recent U.S. pressure on countries such as India, Japan and Turkey to reduce their oil imports from Iran to zero has hit Tehran where it hurts most. And this new strategy of sabotaging oil supply routes in the Persian Gulf may be Iran's 'creative' way of dealing with American absolutism. It might well be Iran's way of looking at the adverse situation created by the U.S.: 'If we can't ship oil, might as well let no one else do it too.'

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