

## A WAR OF MASKS BETWEEN IRAN AND THE U.S.

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

On June 20, Iran and the United States came dangerously close to a direct armed conflict, with U.S. President Donald Trump [reportedly ordering and then cancelling air strikes against Iran](#), after it shot down a high-tech U.S. drone over the Strait of Hormuz. A closer look at tensions between the two countries would make it seem as if the Iranian authorities were the ones attempting to escalate a regional crisis while avoiding a full-blown war with the U.S. For the Trump administration, it has been about being careful not to be drawn into a West Asian conflict and having the loss of any U.S. service personnel on its conscience.

Yet things are more complicated than what is appearing on news channels. On one side, the Ayatollahs and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) want to save their necks by convincing the U.S.'s allies in Europe, West Asia and Asia to pressure Washington into easing the devastating economic and financial sanctions that have affected the Iranian economy. On the other side, the hawks in Washington, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and National Security Adviser John Bolton, have an ardent desire to restore U.S. deterrence by striking Iranian military infrastructure and nuclear installations. In the middle of this there are a number of state and non-state actors such as Israel, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which would be the prime targets for Iranian attacks, or which would get militarily engaged on the side of Iran and go after U.S. targets.

Clouds of war: on U.S.'s 'maximum pressure' tactics with Iran

Once in war with the Islamic Republic of Iran, the U.S. would have to contend with proxies backed by Tehran spreading across the region, armed with missiles, drones and as suicide bombers. There is virtually no way for Saudi Arabia and the UAE to protect themselves from Iranian proxy attacks. Let us take the example of Iranian-backed Houthi rebels, who have fought a coalition led by Saudi Arabia to a stalemate on the battlefield since 2015 and have succeeded in launching missiles and rockets into Saudi territory. In Lebanon and Iraq, the Iranian regime's proxies have killed hundreds of American soldiers since the early 1980s. In 1983, a group linked to the Iranian-backed Shiite militia, Hezbollah, claimed responsibility for lethal bombings of the U.S. Embassy in Beirut and a U.S. Marine barracks.

Nearly a month ago, in a meeting with Iran-linked Iraqi militias in Baghdad, Major General Qassim Suleimani, the chief of Iran's Quds Force, which is a unit of the IRGC, asked them to prepare for a proxy war with the U.S. Strangely, Iran's campaign of proxy war and sabotage will be designed to inflict some suffering on regional and international actors that have chosen to be with America in this conflict, while dissuading Mr. Trump and his advisers from taking military action against Iranian interests.

Given that "maximum pressure" sanctions have achieved their goal and the Iranian authorities are desperate to find a way out of this crisis, the role of potential mediators will be crucial. The government of President Hassan Rouhani is quietly trying out all possibilities to find a diplomatic pathway out of the crisis. But a dialogue between Arab leaders and the Iran could begin with more concrete help from Oman and Kuwait in order to de-escalate the war in Yemen and ensure maritime security in the Strait of Hormuz.

Donald Trump says signing 'hard-hitting sanctions' on Iran's supreme leader

Therefore, while Iran and the U.S. are on the edge of the abyss, global diplomacy behind closed doors has been working to find a way out. The removal of Russian missiles from Cuba was former U.S. President J.F. Kennedy's grandest success. However, during the Cuban missile crisis, he had two dangerous situations to deal with simultaneously — missile emplacements and impeachment. In the same way, Mr. Trump is trying to find a way out of the tensions while trying not to damage his chances of a second term in the White House. America's military and technological resources to break down the Islamic regime of Iran are limitless. The only matter to decide is whether it is intellectually wise and politically pragmatic to use all that might.

Both Iran and the U.S. are trying to avoid this war while winning a game of appearances. This game reminds us of the theatrical concept of persona, which gives both Iran and the U.S. a source of political agency and a stable public role to present themselves as being intransigent, inflexible and uncompromising. Consequently, both countries are trying to keep their masks on in order to inscribe themselves on the hearts of humanity. But as Nathaniel Hawthorne writes in *The Scarlet Letter*: "No man, for any considerable period, can wear one face to himself and another to the multitude, without finally getting bewildered as to which may be the true."

*Ramin Jahanbegloo is Director, Mahatma Gandhi Centre for Peace, Jindal Global University, Sonapat*

Please enter a valid email address.

For India and the U.S., managing bilateral ties is linked to balancing nationalist, cultural and economic agendas

Join our online subscriber community

Experience an advertisement-free site with article recommendations tailored for you

Already a user? [Sign In](#)

To know more about Ad free news reading experience and subscription [Click Here](#)

or Please whitelist our website on your Adblocker

**END**

Downloaded from **crackIAS.com**

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com