

A WASHINGTON PIPE DREAM

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

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced on April 22 that the [United States would not issue any additional 'Significant Reduction Exceptions'](#) to existing importers of Iranian oil who had received such exemptions last November. Mr. Pompeo declared that the objective was to bring Iranian oil exports to "zero". India, China and Turkey, the principal remaining oil importers from Iran, will feel the greatest impact of this policy, which will take effect on May 2.

The end of the waivers is expected to bring different responses from the main importers. China, one of the largest importers of Iranian oil, is likely to defy the American demand because as a great power and potential challenger to U.S. hegemony it will not want to be seen as bowing to American pressure. Furthermore, Beijing is firmly opposed to unilateral sanctions, as it fears that one day it may be subjected to similar treatment.

Turkey and Iran have overlapping strategic interests regarding Kurdish secessionism, the territorial integrity of Iraq, and shared antipathy towards Saudi Arabia. Iran is the second largest supplier of energy to Turkey and a leading trading partner as well. Furthermore, Turkey's relations with the U.S. are currently rocky over U.S. support to the Syrian Kurdish militia, the YPG, that Ankara considers a terrorist organisation because of its close relations with the secessionist PKK. The threat of American sanctions on Turkey following the latter's decision to buy S-400 missile defence systems from Russia has also contributed greatly to tensions between the two countries. Therefore, it is unlikely that Turkey will bend completely to American will although it may do so partially to placate its NATO ally.

The American decision could not have come at a worse time for India with the country in the midst of a bitterly fought election campaign and policy makers focussed on the domestic scene. Nevertheless, the Indian response is expected to be the most weak-kneed of the three. New Delhi is likely to comply with American demands, as India's relations with the U.S. in the economic sphere are very important to it. The U.S. is India's largest trading partner and a leading source of foreign investment. It has become increasingly important in the strategic arena as well because of the convergence of American and Indian interests regarding containing China in the Indo-Pacific region. Moreover, the civil nuclear relationship with the U.S. is very important for India, as is American support for India's bid to enter the Nuclear Suppliers Group.

However, compliance with the American diktat will not come without costs. India is heavily involved in building the [Chabahar port](#) in southern Iran. This port is expected to become a major access route for India not only to Iran but also to Afghanistan and Central Asia bypassing hostile Pakistani territory. Tehran is also important for New Delhi in the context of Afghanistan as both are unequivocally opposed to the Pakistan-supported Taliban returning to power even in a power-sharing arrangement. Furthermore, Iran shares India's antipathy toward Pakistan, which it considers Washington's proxy and Saudi Arabia's ally. India's decision to stop importing oil from Iran at America's behest could drive a wedge between New Delhi and Tehran that will be very difficult to repair and cost India strategically.

The most important question is whether Iran will capitulate to the American threat of cutting oil imports down to zero and accept Washington's demand to revise its position on issues the U.S. considers important. These include Tehran totally giving up its right to enrich uranium and closing down all nuclear facilities including those engaged in research for peaceful purposes. Additionally, it would entail Iran drastically curtailing if not completely eradicating its ballistic

missile programme, and radically changing its West Asia policy to fall in line with American preferences in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen.

However, this appears to be a Washington pipe dream. Iran has stood up to unprecedented sanctions for four decades and remained unbowed. The current American policy of forcing Tehran to cut its oil exports to zero will only aid Iranian hardliners and end up with Tehran adopting an even more virulent anti-American posture, further impeding the realisation of American strategic objectives in the region.

While this confrontationalist policy may please Israel and Saudi Arabia, it can well become a prelude to another major war in West Asia. Pushed to the wall by its inability to export oil in sufficient quantities, Iran is likely to retaliate by withdrawing from the nuclear accord and resuming full-scale nuclear enrichment close to weapon grade-level. This could lead to either an American and/or Israeli air and missile strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities. Such attacks are bound to invite Iranian retaliation against American targets in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan and around the Gulf, either through proxies or directly. Iranian retribution is likely to include air strikes against Saudi and Emirati targets as well and concerted efforts to block the Straits of Hormuz.

The mayhem that this action-reaction phenomenon will cause in the region can be disastrous for West Asia and could seriously disrupt the flow of energy supplies from the Gulf through the narrow Straits of Hormuz. It is ironic that some of the authors of America's disastrous invasion of Iraq, such as National Security Adviser John Bolton, are also the masterminds behind the current American confrontationalist policy towards Iran. If not reversed, such a strategy could well lead to another American misadventure in West Asia before which the tragic consequences of the Iraqi invasion, such as state failure and the boost to international terrorism, are likely to pale into insignificance.

Mohammed Ayooob is University Distinguished Professor Emeritus of International Relations, Michigan State University and Non-Resident Senior Fellow, Center for Global Policy, Washington DC

Please enter a valid email address.

All it wants to do is to demolish secular India and the Gandhi-Nehru state to erect a Hindutva state instead

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