

TRUMP, EUROPE AND THE IRAN EFFECT

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

Last month, the impromptu visit of the Iranian Foreign Minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, to the G-7 summit caught many leaders, especially the U.S. President, Donald Trump, off guard. Mr. Zarif was in Biarritz, the venue, at France's behest and though there were no meetings or negotiations with the American delegation, he was able to meet with the French President, Emmanuel Macron, and continue discussions about recent initiatives between the Presidents of Iran and France on the Iranian nuclear issue.

European leaders, and France in particular, have highlighted the Trump administration's "maximum pressure" plan in regard to Iran being a way with no end. And this was why they had decided to try and keep the nuclear deal going despite Iran's seizure of tankers in the Strait of Hormuz. The division between the European Union (EU) and the U.S. over Iran has been one of the most pressing security challenges since Mr. Trump decided last year to abandon the deal that was struck in 2015. The European nations want to preserve the deal, or the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), even if they seem worried about a growing list of violations by Iran of the deal.

Iran has deliberately violated its terms by producing more low-enriched uranium than the agreement permits.

First and foremost, the major reason is that Europe needs to keep the Persian Gulf open to guarantee the flow of oil and ensure its economic security. However, on this issue, France and Germany have refused to join the American plan called "Project Sentinel" to protect ships passing through the Strait of Hormuz. Second, the Europeans are fearful of getting involved in another war in West Asia which they do not want. The truth is that they do not trust that Mr. Trump will keep his word: that he will not attack Iran.

Third and last, the Europeans have been trying to find ways for their businesses to work around American sanctions on Iran. France, Germany and the United Kingdom have developed a mechanism to trade with Iran legally using a trading system known as INSTEX, short for Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges. It has been designed to permit countries to trade with Iran without the use of American dollars, so as to avoid the U.S. financial system. For many European companies, the risk of facing sanctions because of trade with Iran outweighs any gain from trading with the Islamic Republic and more specifically the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) which is targeted by the U.S. as a terrorist organisation.

The Iran crisis and the debate it has fuelled reflects the strains between the U.S. and Europe over the maximalist political approaches of the U.S. President. But it also shows the wariness of America's allies about the war-mongering intentions of Mr. Trump's hawkish advisers to provoke a war with Iran no matter what the consequences are for the rest of the world. As such, the G-7 summit was not a success, especially with the British Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, trying to make a move against the EU on the JCPOA with the need to keep Mr. Trump on his side for an eventual trade deal following Brexit. Let us not forget that relations between Iran and the U.K. are not as rosy as one might think. Iran's recent seizure of a U.K.-flagged tanker in the Strait of Hormuz has thrust the relationship between London and Tehran into deep turmoil. This comes at a sensitive time when the Europeans are trying to salvage the Iranian nuclear deal.

As can be seen, no European country wants to trigger a military confrontation with Iran, one

which would draw in other regional states and non-state actors. Despite the drone war between the Houthis and Saudi Arabia and the Lebanon Hezbollah and Israel which risks drawing in Iran in a new war in West Asia, European powers could play a major role in ending U.S.-led economic warfare against Iran and building a more effective diplomatic process in West Asia.

However, the reality is that at this time the situation is at a deadlock. It appears that the Trump administration will need to make its own calculations, without the advice of its partners, in light of the costly setbacks that some of its recent policies have experienced in the region.

As for the Iranian government, the most immediate priority for containing public unrest and preventing social instability inside the country is to ask for help from France and Germany in finding a way out of the current economic crash dive. But ultimately, Iran will need to show some signs of flexibility that could possibly lead to a situation where some of the arrangements arrived at in the nuclear deal are enlarged and applied to other key issues; these could include a mutually acceptable range for Iran's missile forces as well as Iran's clandestine military adventures with the help of the IRGC in countries such as Yemen, Syria, Iraq and Lebanon.

Consequently, if it is true that the Islamic Republic still does not possess nuclear weapons and its conventional capabilities are still no match for those of the U.S., it is also clear that Iran has hybrid warfare capabilities and an expanded network of proxies and allies in the region which gives it a sharpened capacity to practise its hegemony in West Asia.

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

Support quality journalism - [Subscribe to The Hindu Digital](#)

Please enter a valid email address.

How an idea for a 'perfect Mumbai feature story' failed to materialise

Support Quality Journalism

Prices to increase soon! Subscribe now for the best prices today!

Support The Hindu's new online experience with zero ads.

Already a user? [Sign In](#)

END

Downloaded from **crackIAS.com**

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com