

A U.S. Iran detente could be on the cards

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"The exit of John Bolton and Israel's diminished influence on Washington. signal a possible reduction in tensions."

If it is not Afghanistan then it must be Iran. U.S. President Donald Trump desperately needs a dramatic foreign policy breakthrough before the 2020 elections to establish his reputation as a strategist who can shape afresh the contours of American foreign policy. His love-fest with Kim Jong-un has petered out without producing any noticeable reduction in North Korea's nuclear arsenal or any curbs on its ballistic missile programme. His attempt to get the Taliban to accept a ceasefire so that he could begin withdrawing American troops from Afghanistan, and thus fulfil the promise he had made during the 2016 election campaign, has also stalled because of Kabul's opposition and the Taliban's unwillingness to stop military action before a settlement is announced.

This leaves Iran as the only arena where Mr. Trump can demonstrate his diplomatic dexterity even if it means returning to the status quo that had existed when President Barack Obama left office. However, Mr. Trump would like to add a dramatic flourish to turning the clock back.

Some of Mr. Trump's closest associates, especially the recently sacked National Security Advisor John Bolton, have been promoting a policy that amounted to advocating a regime change in Iran, even if by force. However, Mr. Trump is fundamentally averse to leading the U.S. into an open-ended war with Iran. This stance is prompted largely by his attachment to his campaign promise of bringing American soldiers home that garnered a significant number of votes for him in the last election. He, therefore, abhors the idea of sending more of them to the volatile West Asia.

Zarif's visit to Biarritz

These instincts were on display at the recently concluded G7 meeting in France following an unscheduled visit by Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif to Biarritz for talks with the French President Emmanuel Macron. President Macron announced at the conclave that a Trump-Rouhani meeting was likely to take place in the "coming weeks".

Mr. Trump said that he had no intention of imposing regime change on Iran and declared that under the right circumstances, he would certainly agree to a meeting with Mr. Rouhani.

In a speech hours earlier, Mr. Rouhani had also signalled that he was willing to talk with Trump. He has since qualified his positive response by adding that he would meet Mr. Trump only after Washington lifted the sanctions re-imposed on Tehran after Mr. Trump pulled the U.S. out of the nuclear deal in 2018. But the signal that Iranian

leaders are not averse to talking with their American counterparts has been sent by Tehran and received in Washington. In turn, Mr. Trump reciprocated by stating that he has no problem meeting with President Rouhani. “It could happen. It could happen. No problem with me,” he said earlier this week.

Israel and John Bolton have been the two major obstacles to a direct encounter between the two Presidents as a prelude to a possible rapprochement between the U.S. and Iran. Mr. Trump, despite his close relationship with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, seems to have concluded that the Israeli leader is too dependent on the U.S. and especially on Mr. Trump to attempt to block such a meeting if he decides to go ahead with it. Mr. Netanyahu seemed to confirm this understanding this week when he stated: “Obviously, I don’t tell the U.S. President when to meet or with whom.”

Differences with Israel

Nonetheless, this relative softening of their respective stands by the U.S. and Iran have worried the Israeli establishment. This is why, of late, Mr. Netanyahu has once again been making shrill noises about Iran’s nuclear weapons capability. He has even gone to the extent of identifying a nuclear facility near Isfahan that, according to him, the Iranians destroyed after he had made its existence public. In response Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif promptly tweeted: “The possessor of REAL nukes cries wolf — on an ALLEGED ‘demolished’ site in Iran.” It is clear that there is a fundamental disjuncture between American and Israeli objectives regarding Iran and recent events have begun to bring the fissures in American-Israeli approaches to this issue into the open.

Mr. Bolton, an outspoken foreign policy hawk, has been the standard bearer of the hard line vis-à-vis Iran and is directly or indirectly responsible for many of the harshest measures adopted by the Trump administration in regard to Iran. He was also strongly opposed to the deal that Zalmay Khalilzad had worked out with the Taliban in order to begin an orderly withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan. Mr. Bolton’s virulent opposition to any deal with Iran short of complete denuclearisation and regime change, both objectives beyond the realm of possibility, had angered Mr. Trump, especially because it ran counter to his instinctive antipathy toward getting involved in overseas military conflicts.

However, the firing of John Bolton, when combined with the visible diminishing of Israeli influence on U.S. policy toward Iran, signals that Washington is interested in easing tensions with Tehran. This is confirmed by the Secretary of State Mike Pompeo’s statement on September 10 that it was possible that a meeting between Mr. Trump and Mr. Rouhani could take place this month on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly session in New York. Such a meeting, even if it does not immediately resolve all the contentious bilateral issues, could form the beginning of a de-escalatory process that is likely to benefit both Washington and Tehran in the long run.

The events between the US and Iran that sparked controversy

Introduction

- The relationship between America and Iran has always been strong, but these days the tension has increased so much that both are standing at the face of war. The exercise of going to Tehran as ambassador by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan has also failed.
- The US was about to attack after Iran shot down an American drone that stopped itself at the last moment. The spark has ignited. If we believe those who have a keen eye on global affairs, it can become the cause of a great war.

1. Trump started it by quashing nuclear deal

- Donald Trump broke the nuclear deal between Iran and the United States on May 8, 2018, done during former US President Barack Obama. By doing this, he also fulfilled his election promise. This move created a tension between the powerful countries of the world.
- However, France, Britain, Germany, Russia, China and Iran decided to remain bounded by the deal even after the US withdrew from the deal.

2. Increased tension with sanctions on Iran

- In order to hurt Iran's economy, on August 7, 2018, the US administration reimposed all sanctions that were lifted under the nuclear deal.
- Since then, there has been tension between the US and Iran. Iran has said that it is ready to give a befitting reply to every threat from the US.

3. IGRC Declared Terrorist Organization, and tension grew further

- On April 8, 2019, the US declared Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IGRC) a terrorist organization.
- This was first time done when a government security agency of another country. Iran, in turn, also called

the US military a terrorist group. This led to further talk.

4. Attack on oil tankers gave oil for fire

- On May 13, 2019, four US oil tankers were attacked in the Gulf of Hormuz, the most important waterway of the oil trade.
- Balton, the security adviser to America, blamed Iran for this, but Iran dismissed the allegations.
- Subsequently, on May 24, the US administration decided to send 1500 more troops to further strengthen its position in the region.

5. Iran shot down drone

- Iran killed US drone on 20 June. Both countries confirmed this, but the US said that when their drone was on the international waters, it was dropped, while Iran argued that the drone was targeted only when it entered the air range.
- Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi said that we are committed to protecting our border. Whatever the US decides, Iran will not tolerate violations of its borders. We are ready to respond to every threat.

6. Iran's counter-attack will be fatal

- 'America knows how deadly Iran's counter-attack will be if it attacks Iran.
- Iran can respond to the US this time as well as target its friendly countries like the UAE. They cannot take this risk. '

7. Trump's 2020 election yet on the agenda

- The 2020 election is on Trump's agenda. he want another term. He has kept the promises made during the election. Whether it was to break the nuclear agreement and break Iran's back from economic sanctions.
- In such a situation, he does not want to create war and create instability in the Gulf region. The war also hampers the economy, stability and speed of development of the invading country. He does not want to take any risk by doing so.

Expected Questions (Prelims Exams)

1. Consider the following statements related to the Iran nuclear deal:

1. In the 2015 agreements with America, Britain, Russia, France and Germany, Iran agreed to regulate its nuclear program.
2. The US is pulling out of this agreement because it says that the agreement is defective and gives Iran access to billions of dollars.
3. The Iran agreement, despite its shortcomings, could have been a good example of the ability of world powers to come together and resolve a complex issue diplomatically.

Which of the above statements are not correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 (b) 1 and 3
(c) 2 and 3 (d) All of the above

Expected Questions (Mains Exams)

- Q. There is a better opportunity for US President Trump to resolve the dispute with Iran after the unsuccess with Afghanistan, North Korea. How important do you think America is to improve relations with Iran? Also discuss the global implications of the US-Iran relationship. (250 Words)**

Note: Answer of Prelims Expected Question given on 12 Sept. is 1 (d)

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