

U.S. Escalates Tensions with Iran and North Korea

On August 9, 47 of the highest ranking U.S. national security officials for the last half century issued a statement “warning against U.S. withdrawal from in the international nuclear agreement [Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action-JCPOA] with Iran as long as Iran is complying and recommending a comprehensive policy toward Iran that furthers U.S. national security interests.” A similar statement by the nation’s most acknowledged national security officials was signed after the JCPOA was signed in June 2015.

This means that a strong contingent of the top U.S decision makers favor the deal. It is notable that these officials—diplomats, generals, admirals, scholars, and congress members—did so amidst the current controversy regarding North Korea’s nuclear weapons programs

Most national security analysts think that Iran and North Korea now possess the capabilities to manufacture nuclear weapons and will soon be able to deliver them by aircraft and/or intercontinental ballistic missiles.

The difference between North Korea and Iran is that Iran has signed the JCPOA and signees of the announcement agreed, “No American national security objective would be served by withdrawing from it as long as Iran is meeting the agreement’s requirements. To the contrary, given the continuing assurance by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that Iran is in compliance with the agreement, the JCPOA, such a unilateral act would have grave long term political and security consequences for the United States.”

More importantly, the signees state, if President Trump were to refuse to certify Iran’s compliance, as he as threatened to do when the issue come up once again in October, that would lead to the implementing of more

sanctions that were suspended by the June 2015 agreement. This implies that the U.S.—rather than Iran—would be in violation of the agreement; meaning that it is the U.S. –not Iran that is war mongering.

Trump administration national security advisers seem to think that the U.S. would be able to “manage” such a conflict and that it would not end in the historical disaster resulting from the U.S. 2003 war with Iraq.

But analysts, especially Middle East experts, suggest such an action by the Trump administration could lead to multiple escalating conflicts. Already in the past few months there have been reportedly some 15 “incidents” in the Persian Gulf between U.S. and Iranian naval forces.

While such incidents have been mostly confined in the Persian Gulf, there are also the probabilities of U.S.-backed groups engaging with Iranian forces in Iran’s eastern province of Baluchistan (largely Sunni) among the ethnic Arab (Shi’a) population in southern Iran, and Kurds (largely Sunni) in northwestern Iran.

<http://carnegieendowment.org/2016/11/30/sectarian-dilemmas-in-iranian-foreign-policy-when-strategy-and-identity-politics-collide-pub-66288>

On August 8, tensions increased further when the commander of Iranian-backed forces in Syria accused American troops of “colluding” with Islamic State and jihadist forces along the Iraq-Syria border in which the Associated Press reported “that more than 40 fighters were killed in the battle and local media reported that 85 were killed.” The accusation was quickly denied by a U.S. spokesman.

<http://www.mei.edu/content/io/iraqi-militia-leader-says-will-hold-us-responsible-killing-40-militiamen-7-irgc-officers>

The battle for eastern Syria between Iranian-backed forces and U.S. and U.S.-backed forces means that the conflict between Iranian and Iranian-backed forces with U.S. forces and U.S.-backed forces will likely take place on land and not in the Persian Gulf.

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The reason is clear. The Trump administration thinks that the viability of its national security politics toward Iraq and Syria—the latter including policies toward Russia, Turkey, Iran and the al-Asad regime—hinges on dominating, with its Kurdish allies, the entire region east of the Euphrates River.

The Trump administration is claiming that Iran is not in compliance with the JCPOA, despite the assertion by some of the U.S.' most respected national security experts that Tehran is in compliance, is to shift the blame from Washington to Tehran regarding the U.S.' inability to adequately challenge the substantial geopolitical gains that Iran has made in Iraq and Syria the past 14 years as a result of Washington's wrongheaded and misguided policies.

North Korea has little geopolitical value in and of itself for the U.S. but it is important for U.S. geostrategic and geo-economic global posture which is determined by relations with China, Japan, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia, hence, the pivot toward Asia.

Syria on the other hand, while not geo-economically important for the U.S., it is vitally important that its total collapse will not threaten Israel—the U.S.' most important ally in the Middle East for both foreign and domestic reasons, especially for cyber warfare, aircraft, and missile production. This suggests that Syria is more important than North Korea.

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