

# Trump should prioritise US allies over new Iran deal

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BARIA ALAMUDDIN

The author of “The Art of the Deal” is said to be so desperate for Iranian President Hassan Rouhani to talk to him at the UN General Assembly that he has reportedly been discussing showering Tehran with billions of dollars-worth of sanctions relief. This dumbfounding revelation is apparently what triggered the acrimonious departure from the Donald Trump administration of National Security Adviser John Bolton, the architect of efforts to ratchet up pressure against Iran.

A Rouhani adviser hailed Bolton’s departure as a “defeat of America’s maximum pressure strategy.” Trump, meanwhile, wistfully opines to journalists that “Iran wants to meet.” World leaders are now miserably familiar with Trump’s one-trick-pony negotiating style: In public threatening the “official end of Iran,” while behind the scenes repeatedly pleading for the ayatollahs to meet with him. Trump scarcely grasps that, even if he meets Rouhani and Foreign Minister Mohammed Javad Zarif, they are glorified diplomats. It is, of course, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and Gen Qassem Soleimani calling the shots from the background.

Although mid-ranking US officials have speculated about expanding sanctions against the allies of Hezbollah, Trump has conspicuously not committed himself to compelling Iran to halt its sponsorship of vast transnational paramilitary forces that are complicit in war crimes, sectarian cleansing,

and the destabilisation of Arab nations. Having undermined America’s reputation for honouring agreements by tearing up the 2015 nuclear deal — largely because it bore his predecessor’s signature — Trump now suggests that Iran must simply halt its nuclear program, i.e., a return to the status quo from the start of his presidency.

Yet Iran has already fired up a new generation of IR-6 centrifuges, which are 10 times faster than earlier models and capable of enriching uranium to the 90 percent purity required for a nuclear weapon. By allowing Tehran to walk away from its commitments, the Trump administration has inadvertently facilitated its path toward nuclear supremacy. Although Israel could resort to airstrikes, it may lack the firepower required to destroy reactors built deep underground in anticipation of such pre-emptive strikes.

Trump’s glitzy Korea summits sought to showcase the president as a globe-straddling dealmaker. Instead they gave Kim Jong Un the exposure and legitimacy he craved, without committing him to substantive concessions. While North Korea’s blood-drenched dictator today tests ballistic missiles and pursues his nuclear program, Trump blindly proclaims their “beautiful relationship.” Such incompetent diplomacy in Iran’s case would simply incentivise Tehran to intensify its nuclear program and clandestine terrorist activities, while escaping international isolation.

If Tehran does receive the proposed \$15 billion in sanctions relief, it will be prioritised for the bankrolling of paramilitary terrorism, exactly as billions of dollars of unfrozen funds were after 2015. This would represent a disgraceful



Trump declaring sanctions on Iran at his White House office.

betrayal of America’s Middle Eastern allies.

Tehran boasts that it exercises de facto control over four Arab states, where it is stockpiling rocket arsenals with ranges of up to 700 kilometers. The world has largely ignored hundreds of drone and missile strikes from Iraq and Yemen against Saudi airports and civilian targets, including attacks against Aramco oil facilities this weekend. Why don’t the repeated targeting of tankers and oil infrastructure and threats to obstruct the Strait of Hormuz trigger urgent alarm bells about the threat posed by Iranian aggression to the global economy and energy security?

If Israel, Iran and additional states are soon capable of threatening one another with mutually assured destruction, tiny nations like Lebanon face annihilation. The terrorist mullahs of Tehran, under their nuclear shield, would enjoy region-wide impunity for whatever paramilitary adventures Soleimani’s fevered imagination

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chooses to embark on. A nuclearised Iran could decorate Lebanon and Iraq’s borders with forests of missile launch sites, confident that nobody would dare to challenge it.

What of Trump’s fabled deal-making genius? He promised the “deal of the century” for Palestine and then casually surrendered Jerusalem and the occupied Golan Heights. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu last week vowed to de-

vour much of the West Bank, confident of US acquiescence. Trump, meanwhile, was hours away from hosting Taliban terrorists as guests of honour at Camp David — coinciding with America commemorating the 9/11 attacks that were planned on Afghan soil under Mullah Omar’s patronage. The Taliban dictates its demands with increasing assertiveness, knowing that Trump, who appears incapable of keeping his negotiating cards close to his chest, is desperate to cut and run from Afghanistan.

With trade wars pitching the global economy into recession, the White House is anxious to tout policies that have not been utter train wrecks ahead of Trump’s 2020 re-election bid. Hence the desperation for any deal the administration could beg or bribe Tehran to sign up to; irrespective of whether this fundamentally destabilises the Middle East, transfers billions of dollars into the pockets of terrorist proxies, or the ensuing chaos paves the way for future

9/11s and new generations of terrorism.

The Islamic Republic must be forced to acknowledge that the pursuit of nuclear weapons, terrorism and regional militancy will not reinforce its overseas muscle, but rather will guarantee its demise. Genuine negotiations usually require years of tenacious efforts and careful diplomacy, and the Iranian regime is notorious for its fierce negotiating style. Priding himself on personally leading talks, with little grasp of the labyrinthine complexities and craving the cheap gratification of immediate results, Trump would be woefully, terrifyingly, out of his depth.

Barack Obama’s flawed 2015 deal at least represented a sincere effort to address the world’s foremost proliferation threat. The Trump administration’s calamitous overseas machinations aspire neither to international peace nor US security, instead catering solely to the ego and personal agenda of one man, who — if there is any justice in the world — will be soundly defeated in November 2020.

The latest attacks by Iranian proxies against Saudi Arabia and other targets demonstrate that, when the world fails to stand strong against pariah states, they are emboldened to escalate their terrorist aggression. Instead of pursuing a new “love story” with the theocrats of Tehran, America should prioritise the security of its real Middle Eastern allies; thereby maximising the stability of the global economy and the collective security of the international community.

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## CIVILIAN’S TRIBUNE

# Put an end to these man-made disasters

Environmentalists often caution authorities about the dangers of deforestation, reckless construction activity by the land mafia and quarrying. These destroy the natural drainage channels and harm the water bodies. We have seen how this double whammy caused flooding in Chennai, Mumbai, and Uttarakhand in recent years.

Flooding in Kerala was forecast years ago but officials, in nexus with builders, continued to sanction construction projects without taking the topography into account.

But those environmental violations from the past have left the state suffering financial losses and have adversely affected businesses too.

Also, it is not just about one state. Warnings of increased frequency of extreme weather events, severe droughts, rise in the sea level and melting of glaciers from scientists all over the world are unheeded and we continue to remain in a state of denial. Development should not come at the cost of environment.

**Safeer**

