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U.S.-Iran Tensions and Implications for U.S. Policy

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SUMMARY

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U.S.-Iran Tensions and Implications for U.S. Policy

In the spring of 2019, U.S.-Iran tensions have escalated. The Trump Administration, following its 2018 withdrawal from the 2015 multilateral nuclear agreement with Iran (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, JCPOA), has taken several steps in its campaign of applying "maximum pressure" on Iran. Iran or Iran-linked forces have targeted commercial ships and infrastructure in U.S. partner countries.

U.S. officials have stated that Iran-linked threats to U.S. forces and interests, and attacks on several commercial ships in May and June 2019, have prompted the Administration to send additional military assets to the region to deter future Iranian actions. President Donald Trump, while warning Iran not to take action against the United States, has said he prefers a diplomatic solution over moving toward military confrontation. The Administration has expanded U.S. sanctions against Iran, including sanctioning its mineral and petrochemical exports during May-June 2019, placing further pressure on Iran's economy.

Iranian leaders have refused to talk directly with the Administration, and they have announced an intent to no longer comply with some aspects of the JCPOA. U.S. allies and other countries such as Russia and China have expressed a preference to reduce tensions. Several countries, including Japan, Germany, Oman, Qatar, and Iraq, have sought to de-escalate U.S.-Iran tensions by sending high-level officials to Tehran for talks.

An expanding action-reaction dynamic between the United States and Iran has the potential to escalate into significant conflict. The United States military has the capability to undertake a large range of options against Iran in the event of conflict, both against Iran directly and against its regional allies and proxies. However, Iran's alliances with and armed support for armed factions throughout the region, and its network of agents in Europe, Latin America, and elsewhere, give Iran the potential to expand any confrontation into areas where U.S. response options might be limited.

Members of Congress have received additional information from the Administration about the causes of the uptick in U.S.-Iran tensions and Administration planning for further U.S. responses. They have responded in a number of ways; some Members have sought to pass legislation requiring congressional approval for any decision by the President to take military action against Iran.

Additional detail on U.S. policy options on Iran, Iran's regional and defense policy, and Iran sanctions can be found in: CRS Report RL32048, *Iran: Internal Politics and U.S. Policy and Options*, by Kenneth Katzman; CRS Report RS20871, *Iran Sanctions*, by Kenneth Katzman; CRS Report R44017, *Iran's Foreign and Defense Policies*, by Kenneth Katzman; and CRS Report R43983, *2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force: Issues Concerning Its Continued Application*, by Matthew C. Weed.

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Context for Recent U.S.-Iran Tensions

U.S.-Iran relations have been mostly adversarial—but with varying degrees of intensity—since the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran. Since then, U.S. officials consistently have identified Iran's support for militant Middle East groups as a significant threat to U.S. interests and allies. Attempting to constrain Iran's nuclear program took precedence in U.S. policy after 2002 as that program advanced. The United States also has sought to block Iran's ability to purchase advanced conventional weaponry and to develop ballistic missiles.

In May 2018, the Trump Administration withdrew the United States from the 2015 nuclear agreement (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, JCPOA) on the grounds that the agreement did not address a broad range of U.S. concerns about Iranian behavior and would not permanently preclude the potential for Iran to develop a nuclear weapon.[1] Administration officials, such as Secretary of State Michael Pompeo and his senior adviser on Iran affairs, Ambassador Brian Hook, say that Administration policy is to apply "maximum pressure" on Iran's economy to (1) compel it to renegotiate the JCPOA to address the broad range of U.S. concerns and (2) deny Iran the revenue to continue to develop its strategic capabilities or intervene throughout the region. [2] Administration statements also suggest that an element of the policy could be to create enough economic difficulties to stoke unrest in Iran, possibly to the point where the regime collapses.[3]

As the Administration has pursued its policy of maximum pressure, bilateral tensions have escalated significantly, with U.S. steps going beyond the reimposition of all U.S. sanctions that were in force before JCPOA went into effect in early 2016. Key developments since April 2019 include the following:

- On April 8, 2019, the Administration designated the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO),[4] representing the first time that an official military force was designated as an FTO. The designation stated that "The IRGC continues to provide financial and other material support, training, technology transfer, advanced conventional weapons, guidance, or direction to a broad range of terrorist organizations, including Hizballah, Palestinian terrorist groups like Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Kata'ib Hizballah in Iraq, al-Ashtar Brigades in Bahrain, and other terrorist groups in Syria and around the Gulf…. Iran continues to allow Al Qaeda (AQ) operatives to reside in Iran, where they have been able to move money and fighters to South Asia and Syria."[5] Iran's parliament responded by enacting legislation declaring U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) and related forces in the Middle East to be terrorists.

- As of May 2, 2019, the Administration ended a U.S. sanctions exception for any country to purchase Iranian oil, aiming to drive Iran's oil exports to "zero."[6]

[1] For information on the JCPOA and the rationale for the U.S. withdrawal, see CRS Report R43333, *Iran Nuclear Agreement and U.S. Exit*, by Paul K. Kerr and Kenneth Katzman.

[2] Speech by Secretary of State Michael Pompeo. Heritage Foundation. May 21, 2018; Testimony of Ambassador Brian Hook before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Middle East, North Africa, Hearing on U.S.-Iran Relations. June 19, 2019.

[3] Secretary of State Pompeo speech to the Heritage Foundation, op. cit.

[4] Statement from the President on the Designation of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a Foreign Terrorist Organization. April 8, 2019. https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/statement-president-designation-islamic-revolutionary-guard-corps-foreign-terrorist-organization/

[5] Department of State. Office of the Spokesperson. Factsheet: Designation of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. April 8, 2019.

[6] State Department factsheet, April 22, 2019. https://www.state.gov/advancing-the-u-s-maximum-pressure-campaign-

- On May 3, 2019, the Administration ended waivers under the Iran Freedom and Counter-Proliferation Act (IFCA, P.L. 112-239) that allow countries to help Iran remain within stockpile limits set by the JCPOA.[7]
- On May 5, 2019, citing reports that Iran might be preparing its allies to attack U.S. personnel or installations, National Security Adviser John Bolton announced that the United States was accelerating the previously planned deployment of the USS Abraham Lincoln Carrier Strike Group to the region and sending a bomber task force to the Persian Gulf region.[8]
- On May 8, the President issued Executive Order 13871, blocking the U.S.-based property of persons and entities determined by the Administration to have conducted significant transactions with Iran's iron, steel, aluminum, or copper sectors.[9]

Iranian Responses and Actions

Iran appeared to react to the U.S. actions taken in April and May 2019 by seeking to demonstrate its ability to harm global commerce and other U.S. interests. Iran also could be trying to cause international actors, such as Russia, European countries, and countries in Asia that depend on stable oil supplies, to put pressure on the Trump Administration to reduce its sanctions pressure on Iran. As discussed below, Iran also took steps that signaled its objection to continuing to uphold its JCPOA commitments in the face of U.S. sanctions that deny it the benefits of the accord.

On May 12-13, four oil tankers—two Saudi, one Emirati, and one Norwegian ship—were damaged. Iran denied involvement in the incidents, but a Defense Department official on May 24 attributed the tanker attacks to the IRGC.[10] A report to the United Nations from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Norway, based on their investigation, found that a "state actor" was likely responsible, but did not name a specific perpetrator.[11]

On June 13, 2019, two Saudi tankers in the Gulf of Oman were attacked. One was carrying petrochemicals and the other, crude oil, to buyers in Asia. The same day, Secretary of State Michael Pompeo stated

> It is the assessment of the U.S. government that Iran is responsible for the attacks that occurred in the Gulf of Oman today. The assessment is based on the intelligence, the weapons used, the level of expertise needed to execute the operation, recent similar Iranian attacks on shipping, and the fact that no proxy group in the area has the resources and proficiency to act with such a high degree of sophistication.… Iran is lashing out because the regime wants our successful maximum pressure campaign lifted.… Today I have instructed our U.N. Ambassador John Cohen to raise Iran's attacks to the U.N. Security Council meeting later this afternoon. Our policy remains an economic and diplomatic effort

on-iran/

[7] Letter from Mary Elizabeth Taylor, Assistant Secretary of State for Legislative Affairs, to Senator James Risch, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. May 3, 2019.

[8] The text of the announcement can be found at https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/statement-national-security-advisor-ambassador-john-bolton-2/

[9] The text of the Order can be accessed at https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-imposing-sanctions-respect-iron-steel-aluminum-copper-sectors-iran/

[10] Department of Defense Briefing on Iran. May 24, 2019. For analysis on Saudi Arabia, see CRS Report RL33533, *Saudi Arabia: Background and U.S. Relations*, by Christopher M. Blanchard

[11] CBS News, June 7, 2019. https://www.cbsnews.com/news/oil-tanker-attacks-us-blames-iran-state-actor-photos-uae-saudi-arabia-norway-un/

> to bring Iran back to the negotiating table at the right time, to encourage a comprehensive deal that addresses the broad range of threats—threats today apparent for all the world to see—to peace and security.…[12]

In addition to direct Iranian action, Iran's allies in the region conducted attacks that might have been linked to the escalating U.S.-Iran tension, although the groups in question did not announce direct linkage. On May 19, 2019, a rocket was fired into the secure "Green Zone" in Baghdad but it caused no injuries or damage.[13] Iran-backed Iraqi militias were widely suspected of the firing and U.S. Defense Department officials attributed it to Iran.[14] The incident came four days after the State Department ordered "nonemergency U.S. government employees" to leave U.S. diplomatic facilities in Iraq, claiming a heightened threat that Iranian allies may act against the United States there. In mid-June, there were several other rocket attacks in Iraq, including one that landed near a housing compound for employees of an Exxon-Mobil energy project in the southern Iraqi province of Basra, wounding several persons.[15] A May 2019 attack on Saudi pipeline infrastructure in Saudi Arabia with an unmanned aerial aircraft, first attributed to being launched from Yemen, was later determined to have been initiated from Iraq.[16]

In June 2019, the Houthis claimed responsibility for three attacks on an airport in Abha, southern Saudi Arabia;[17] the latest of the attacks on the Abha airport, on June 23, killed one person. On June 19, the Houthis reportedly fired a missile at a Saudi power station.[18] The Houthis have been fighting against a Saudi-led Arab coalition that intervened in Yemen against the Houthis in March 2015, and it is not clear that the recent Houthi attacks are directly related to the heightened U.S.-Iran tensions.

In a June 13, 2019, statement, Secretary of State Pompeo asserted Iranian responsibility for a May 31, 2019, car bombing in Afghanistan that wounded four U.S. military personnel. Recent State Department reports have asserted that Iran is providing materiel support to Taliban militants, but the Taliban claimed responsibility for the May 31 attack and outside experts asserted that the Iranian role in that attack is unclear or even unlikely. [19]

Iran Downing of U.S. Drone

On June 20, 2019, Iran shot down an unmanned aerial surveillance aircraft (RQ-4A Global Hawk Unmanned Aerial Vehicle) near the Strait of Hormuz, claiming it had entered Iranian airspace over the Gulf of Oman. U.S. Central Command officials stated that the drone was over international waters.[20] IRGC commander-in-chief Maj. Gen. Hossein Salami stated "The downing

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[12] Statement by the Secretary of State. June 13, 2019.

[13] For analysis on Iraq, see CRS Report R45025, *Iraq: Background and U.S. Policy*, by Christopher M. Blanchard

[14] Department of Defense Briefing on Iran. May 24, 2019, op. cit.

[15] Rockets strike near U.S.-linked oil installation and military bases in Iraq; 3 wounded. *Washington Post*, June 19, 2019.

[16] "U.S. says Saudi pipeline attacks originated in Iraq: Wall Street Journal." *Reuters*, June 28, 2019. For analysis on the Yemen conflict, see CRS Report R43960, *Yemen: Civil War and Regional Intervention*, by Jeremy M. Sharp

[17] https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/yemeni-rebels-claim-new-drone-attack-on-saudi-airport/2019/06/17/69912fca-90f8-11e9-b72d-d56510fa753e_story.html?utm_term=.7cd64e27b377

[18] https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/06/yemen-houthis-hit-saudi-power-station-missile-report-190620055746227.html

[19] "The Taliban Claimed an Attack on U.S. Forces. Pompeo Blamed Iran." *Washington Post*, June 16, 2019.

[20] See US Central Command Statement https://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/STATEMENTS/Statements-View/Article/1881682/us-central-command-statement-iranians-shoot-down-us-drone/.

of the American drone is an open, clear and categorical message, which is: the defenders of the borders of Iran will decisively deal with any foreign aggression.… This is the way the Iranian nation deals with its enemies."

On June 20, 2019, according to his posts on the Twitter social media site, President Trump ordered a strike on three Iranian sites related to the Global Hawk downing, but called off the strike on the grounds that it would have caused Iranian casualties and therefore been "disproportionate" to the Iranian shootdown.[21] The United States did reportedly launch a cyber attack against Iranian radar and missile batteries and an Iranian spy group that has ties to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and was connected to the tanker attacks that occurred one week earlier.[22]

Parallels to Past Incidents in the Gulf[23]

Iran's apparent attacks on tankers in May and June share some characteristics with events in the mid-to-late 1980s during the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war. 1987-88 represented the height of the so-called "tanker war," in which both Iran and Iraq were attacking ships in the Gulf. The United States backed Iraq during that war, and sought to limit and deter Iranian attacks on shipping, but there were several U.S.-Iran skirmishes in the Gulf. To protect commercial shipping, the United States launched "Operation Earnest Will" in July 1987, in which the United States reflagged 11 of Kuwait's oil tankers and the U.S. Navy escorted them through the Gulf. Almost immediately after the operation began, one of the tankers, the Bridgeton, was damaged by a large contact mine laid by Iran. In August 1987, U.S. forces captured the Iran Ajr, an Iranian landing craft being used for covert minelaying. However, Iran continued attacking, including with missiles; on October 16, 1987 an Iranian Silkworm missile struck on a U.S.-flagged Kuwaiti tanker, Sea Isle City, ten miles off Kuwait's Al Ahmadi port. In response to that attack, U.S. destroyers and Special Operations forces blew up an Iranian oil platform east of Bahrain. On April 14, 1988, an Iranian-laid mine struck the U.S. frigate Samuel B. Roberts on patrol in the central Gulf, an attack that led to an April 16, 1988 naval confrontation in which the United States, in Operation Praying Mantis, put a large part of Iran's naval force out of action, including sinking one of Iran's two frigates and rendering the other inoperable. On July 3, 1988, mistaking it for an attacking Iranian aircraft, the guided missile cruiser U.S.S. Vincennes shot down Iran Air commercial passenger flight 655, killing all aboard.

International Responses to the Current Dynamic

Responses by U.S. partners and other actors to the U.S.-Iran tensions appeared consistent with positions of major international players on the JCPOA and on the Trump Administration's decision to withdraw from it. Secretary Pompeo's statement on June 13, 2019, "call[ed] upon all nations threatened by Iran's provocative acts to join us in that endeavor [of compelling Iran to return to the negotiating table]." However, key U.S. allies in Europe—all of whom criticized the U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA—have not generally supported the U.S. position on the tensions thus far, tending instead to call for an easing of tensions and for "maximum restraint" by the United States.[24] After the initial escalation of tensions in early May, Secretary of State Pompeo attended meetings with EU officials on May 13 to brief them on U.S. intelligence about the heightened Iranian threat. At the conclusion of the meetings, UK Foreign Secretary Jeremy

[21] President Donald Trump interview on NBC "Meet the Press." June 23, 2019.

[22] "U.S. Seeks Other Ways to Stop Iran Shy of War." *New York Times*, June 24, 2019.

[23] Much of this textbox is derived from, Ronald O'Rourke. U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings. "The Tanker War." May 1988; and CRS Issue Brief IB87145. "Persian Gulf: U.S. Military Operations." January 19, 1989.

[24] "Distrustful of Both Sides, Europe Urges 'Maximum Restraint" as Tensions Escalate." *New York Times*, June 15, 2019.

Hunt stated "We [EU] are very worried about the risk of a conflict happening by accident, with an escalation unintended really on either side."[25]

Several EU countries, including Germany, openly questioned U.S. assertions of Iranian responsibility for the June 13 attacks. The UK was an exception; its Foreign Office issued a statement saying: "It is almost certain that a branch of the Iranian military—the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps—attacked the two tankers on 13 June. No other state or non-state actor could plausibly have been responsible."[26] After the United States released videos purporting to show the IRGC at one of the tankers, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said that there was "strong evidence" Iran committed the attacks, but the EU and the German foreign ministers maintained that they had not reached any conclusions and were continued to evaluate the evidence.[27]

Russia is a signatory to the JCPOA and a partner of Iran in Syria and on other issues, and Russia's deputy foreign minister warned the United States against using the latest tanker attacks to "further aggravate the situation in an anti-Iran sense."[28] On the other hand, Saudi Arabia, a major adversary of Iran, called for "decisive" action to protect global energy supplies that it said are threatened by Iran.[29]

JCPOA-Related Iranian Responses[30]

Since the Trump administration's May 2018 announcement that the United States would no longer participate in the JCPOA, Iranian officials repeatedly have rejected renegotiating the agreement or discussing a new agreement. Tehran also has conditioned its ongoing adherence to the JCPOA on the remaining parties' providing the agreement's benefits. On May 10, 2018, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif wrote that, in order for the agreement to survive, "the remaining JCPOA Participants and the international community need to fully ensure that Iran is compensated unconditionally through appropriate national, regional and global measures." He added that

> Iran has decided to resort to the JCPOA mechanism [the Joint Commission established by the agreement] in good faith to find solutions in order to rectify the United States' multiple cases of significant non-performance and its unlawful withdrawal, and to determine whether and how the remaining JCPOA Participants and other economic partners can ensure the full benefits that the Iranian people are entitled to derive from this global diplomatic achievement.[31]

[25] "Pompeo crashes Brussels meeting of E.U. diplomats but changes few minds on Iran." *Washington Post*, May 13, 2019.

[26] "UK joins US in accusing Iran of tanker attacks as crew held." *The Guardian*, June 14, 2019.

[27] Deutsche Velle, June 18, 2019. https://www.dw.com/en/germany-says-there-is-strong-evidence-iran-behind-tanker-attacks/a-49248524

[28] *Moscow Times*, June 13, 2019. https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/06/13/russia-warns-against-using-tanker-attacks-to-pressure-iran-ria-a65991

[29] *Al Jazeera*. June 15, 2019. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/06/iran-renews-ultimatum-nuclear-deal-oil-tanker-tensions-190615090730002.html

[30] This section was prepared by Paul K. Kerr. Specialist in Nonproliferation. For additional details, see CRS Report RL34544, *Iran's Nuclear Program: Status*, by Paul K. Kerr.

[31] "Letter of Foreign Minister to UN Secretary General," May 10, 2018

No remaining JCPOA parties have charged Iran with JCPOA noncompliance.[32] However, Tehran has threatened to reconstitute and resume the country's pre-JCPOA nuclear activities. According to Iranian officials, the country can rapidly reconstitute its fissile material production capability and has begun preparations for expanding its uranium enrichment program since the May 2018 U.S. announcement described above. [33]

Several meetings of the JCPOA-established Joint Commission since the U.S. withdrawal have not produced a firm Iranian commitment to the agreement.[34] Tehran has argued that the remaining JCPOA participants' efforts have been inadequate to sustain the agreement's benefits for Iran. In May 8 letters to the other JCPOA participant governments, Iran announced that, as of that day, Tehran had stopped "some of its measures under the JCPOA," though the government emphasized that it was not withdrawing from the agreement. Specifically, Iran says it will not transfer low enriched uranium (LEU) or heavy water out of the country in order to maintain those stockpiles below the JCPOA-mandated limits.

Behrouz Kamalvandi, spokesperson for the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, warned on June 17, 2019, that Iran would exceed on June 27 the JCPOA-mandated quantitative limit on Iran's LEU stockpile if the agreement's other participants did not meet Tehran's demands. The remaining JCPOA parties reiterated "the key importance of continued full and effective implementation of the agreement by all sides" following a June 28 Joint Commission meeting.[35] But Foreign Minister Zarif announced on July 1 that Iran has taken this step—a claim confirmed by the IAEA.[36]

The Iranian government has stated that it will resume full compliance with the JCPOA if the remaining participants agree during a 60-day period following the May 8, 2019, announcement to meet Tehran's demands (by July 7). Kamalvandi and other Iranian officials have warned that, absent such an agreement, Iran will cease to accept any constraints on the concentration of Iranian-produced LEU. According to a July 1 Iranian government report, Iran will produce by July 7 enriched uranium in a concentration above that permitted by the JCPOA if France, Germany, and the United Kingdom do not "take practical and tangible measures to put into

[32] International Atomic Energy Agency Director General Yukiya Amano reported on May 31 that Iran had conducted research and development using advanced centrifuges; the number of these centrifuges may have exceeded the number permitted by the JCPOA (*Verification and Monitoring in the Islamic Republic of Iran in Light of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2231 (2015),* Report by the Director General, GOV/2019/21, May 31, 2019). In a June 11, 2019, speech to the IAEA Board of Governors, U.S. Ambassador Jackie Wolcott stated that this activity has violated the JCPOA. However, no JCPOA participating government appears to have issued a public finding of Iranian noncompliance with the agreement. Moreover, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini stated during a June 17 press conference that "Iran is still compliant" with the JCPOA.

[33] "Iran Can Resume 20 Per Cent Uranium Enrichment Only in 5 Days: Salehi," Iranian Students News Agency (ISNA), August 22, 2017; "AEOI Chief: Iran Able to Resume 20% Enrichment in Maximum 5 Days," FARS News Agency, August 22, 2017.

[34] Unless otherwise noted, this paragraph is based on "AEOI Chief: Iran No More Remaining Restricted To 300 Kg Ceiling For Enriched Uranium," *Fars News Agency*, May 8, 2019; "Iran: Report Publishes Text of Supreme National Security Council Statement on Nuclear Deal," *Tehran Fararu Online*, May 8, 2019; *Revision: Iran: President Ruhani Heralds New Nuclear Deal Strategy, Announces 60-Day Deadline*, May 8, 2019; *Statement from Supreme National Security Council of the Islamic Republic of Iran,* May 8, 2019; "Spokesman: Iran to Cross 300kg Uranium Stockpile Borderline in 10 Days," *FARS News Agency*, June 17, 2019.

[35] *Chair's Statement Following the 28 June 2019 Meeting of the Joint Commission of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action*, June 28, 2019.

[36] "Zarif: Iran Goes Beyond 300kg Enriched Uranium," *Islamic Republic News Agency*, July 1, 2019; "Iran Nuclear Deal: Enriched Uranium Limit Breached, IAEA Confirms," *BBC News*, July 1, 2019. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-48784786

practice a financial channel" created in January 2019.[37] Iran has previously threatened to resume work on the Arak reactor according to the JCPOA-mandated design.

U.S. Military Deployments

In response to the escalating tensions with Iran, the United States has added forces and military capabilities in the region, beyond the May 5 announcement of the accelerated deployment of the U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln and associated forces, discussed above. The deployments add to a baseline of more than 60,000 U.S. forces in and around the Persian Gulf, which include those stationed at military facilities in the Arab states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE, Qatar, Oman, and Bahrain), and those in Iraq and Afghanistan.[38] Defense Department officials have indicated that the additional deployments since early May restore forces who were redeployed from the region a few years ago, and that the new deployments do not represent a buildup in preparation for any U.S. offensive against Iran.[39] Since the May 5 announcement

- On May 24, 2019, the Defense Department said that the President approved a plan to augment U.S. defense and deterrence against Iran by deploying to the Gulf region an additional 900 military personnel, extending the deployment of another 600 that were sent earlier to operate Patriot missile defense equipment, and sending additional combat and reconnaissance aircraft.[40]
- On June 17, 2019, then-Acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan announced that the United States was sending an additional 1,000 military personnel to the Gulf "for defensive purposes."[41]

Scenarios and Possible Outcomes

Events could take any of several directions that might involve congressional oversight, authorization or limitations on the use of military force, congressional steps to support regional partners potentially affected by conflict, or new sanctions measures.

Further Escalation

U.S. and Iranian officials have said they do not want armed conflict. However, leaders on each side have said they will respond with force if the other attacks, increasing the potential for miscalculation to produce conflict.

If the Iranian leadership decides to undertake actions against U.S. personnel or interests, it has a number of options. Many of those options are in addition to the conventional armed force or the type of attacks that took place in the Gulf and in Iraq in May and June. The IRGC's Qods Force (IRGC-QF) arms, trains, and advises allies and proxies throughout the Middle East region,

[37] "Iran Hopes Europe Will Take Practical Measures by July 7," *Islamic Republic News Agency*, July 1, 2019.

[38] Amid tensions with Iran, White House mulls U.S. military request to send more forces to the Middle East. *Washington Post*, May 23, 2019. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/amid-tensions-with-iran-white-house-considers-us-military-request-to-send-more-forces-to-the-middle-east/2019/05/23/11c2f778-7d71-11e9-a66c-d36e482aa873_story.html?utm_term=.b3201baae60b

[39] "U.S. Deploys Forces to Mideast to Mideast to Deter Iran." Wall Street Journal, May 5, 2019.

[40] Department of Defense Briefing on Iran, May 24, 2019, op. cit.

[41] "U.S. Sending 1,000 troops to Middle East amid heightened. NBC, June 18, 2019.

including in Syria, Lebanon,[42]Iraq, Yemen, and Bahrain.[43] Iran also reportedly has ties to Taliban factions in Afghanistan, where about 15,000 U.S. forces are deployed. Iran reportedly has supplied several of these regional allies with rockets, short-range ballistic missiles, and other weaponry with which they could attack commercial or naval ships, bases, civilian targets, U.S. or other military and civilian personnel in the region, and any number of other targets.[44]The annual State Department report on international terrorism has consistently asserted that Iran and its key ally, Lebanese Hezbollah, have a vast network of agents in Europe, Latin America, and elsewhere that could act against U.S. personnel and interests outside the Middle East.[45]

Status Quo

Iran's leaders have expressed intent to avoid conflict with the United States while indicating that Iran will respond if attacked. President Trump and senior officials have made corresponding comments from the U.S perspective. The tensions could remain, but neither escalate nor de-escalate, particularly if the U.S.-Iran discourse remains mostly bellicose but without any further incidents.

The Administration announced some additional U.S. sanctions on Iran—an Executive Order sanctioning transactions with the Office of Iran's Supreme Leader, on June 24. It is not clear whether these sanctions will cause Iran to escalate its provocations or, alternately, to take up administration offers for diplomacy.

De-Escalation

Either the United States or Iran could try to de-escalate the tensions. Iran, for its part, could potentially take up U.S. offers to negotiate a broader, revised JCPOA, although U.S. demands for a new JCPOA are extensive and Iranian leaders have categorically rejected them. Iran might also offer to de-escalate by pledging to refrain from any interference with international shipping or by reducing its naval operations in the Gulf.

President Trump and other senior officials have stated several times in May and June 2019 that the United States wants to de-escalate tensions, avoid conflict with Iran, and negotiate a revised JCPOA.[46] Before departing on a trip to the region to discuss the Iran issue, Secretary Pompeo stated on June 23: "The President has said repeatedly we want a brighter future for the people of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Those negotiations are the gateway. That's how we'll ultimately achieve this."[47]

Another question that arises is what are the channels or mechanisms to de-escalate tensions through direct or, more likely, indirect talks. The United States and Iran do not have diplomatic relations and there have been no known direct, high-level talks between Iran and the United States since the Trump Administration withdrew from the JCPOA. This absence of relations likely means that any U.S.-Iran de-escalation will need to be facilitated by mediators. Secretary

[42] For analysis on Syria and on Lebanon see CRS Report RL33487, *Armed Conflict in Syria: Overview and U.S. Response*, coordinated by Carla E. Humud and CRS Report R44759, *Lebanon*, by Carla E. Humud.

[43] The Soufan Center. Iran's Playbook—Deconstructing Tehran's Regional Strategy.' May 2019. https://thesoufancenter.org/irans-playbook-deconstructing-tehrans-regional-strategy-by-the-soufan-center/

[44] Ambassador Brian Hook. The Iranian Regime's Transfer of Arms to Proxy Groups. November 29, 2018.

[45] Department of State. Country Reports on Terrorism: 2017.

[46] "Trump Says 'Always a Chance' of War With Iran But Prefers Talks." Bloomberg, June 5, 2019.

[47] Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo Remarks to Press. Joint Base Andrews. June 23, 2019.

Pompeo has discussed the escalating U.S.-Iran tensions in at least one direct contact with Sultan Qaboos of Oman, who in the past has mediated U.S.-Iran talks.[48] Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe sought to mediate a de-escalation during his visit to Iran on June 12-13, 2019, the first visit to Iran by a Japanese leader since the Islamic revolution. That visit followed one by Germany's foreign minister to Tehran in early June. Iranian leaders have said they would not engage in talks with the United States unless the United States resumes implementing the JCPOA.

Another possible means for the United States to de-escalate tensions with Iran is to relax its maximum pressure policy on Iran. Doing so could take the form of exercising waivers or exceptions for certain transactions with Iran, or possibly signaling that no new U.S. sanctions are forthcoming. One example could be the restoration of the sanctions exceptions for the purchase of Iranian oil—a step that could remove Iran's objections to being largely denied the ability to export that vital commodity.

U.S. Military Action: Considerations, Options, and Risks

The military is a tool of national power that the United States can use to advance its objectives, and the design of a military campaign and effective military options depend on the policy goals that U.S. leaders seek to accomplish. The Trump Administration has stated that its "core objective… is the systemic change in the Islamic Republic's hostile and destabilizing actions, including blocking all paths to a nuclear weapon and exporting terrorism."[49] As such, the military could be used in a variety of ways to try and contain and dissuade Iran from prosecuting its "hostile and destabilizing actions." These ways range from increasing presence and posture in the region to use of force to change Iran's regime. As with any use of the military instrument of national power, any employment of U.S. forces in this scenario could result in retaliatory Iranian action and/or the escalation of a crisis.

U.S. military action may not be the appropriate tool to achieve systemic change within the Iranian regime, and may in fact worsen the situation for Iranians sympathetic to a change of regime. Employing overt military force is likely to strengthen anti-American elements within the Iranian Government. Some observers question the utility of military power against Iran due to global strategic considerations. The 2017 National Security Strategy and 2018 National Defense Strategy both note that China and Russia represent the key strategic challenges to the United States today and into the future. As such, shifting military assets into the United States Central Command (CENTCOM) area of responsibility requires diverting them from use in other theaters such as Europe and the Pacific, thereby sacrificing other long-term U.S. strategic priorities.

U.S. officials have stated that the additional U.S. deployments since May are intended to "deter" Iran from taking any further provocative actions. Yet, the downing of the RQ-4A Global Hawk Unmanned Aerial Vehicle on June 20, 2019, demonstrates that deploying additional assets and capabilities has not necessarily succeeded in deterring Iran from using military force.

Still others contend that the risks of military inaction are greater than those associated with the employment of force. For example, should Iran acquire a nuclear weapons capability, U.S.

[48] Department of State. Readout. Secretary Pompeo's Call with Omani Sultan Qaboos bin Sa'id Al Sa'id. May 16, 2019.

[49] The White House, *A Look at the U.S. Strategy for Iran*, February 13, 2019. https://www.whitehouse.gov/articles/look-u-s-strategy-iran/.

options to contain and dissuade it from prosecuting hostile activities could be significantly more constrained than they are at present.[50]

For illustrative purposes only, below are some potential policy options related to the possible use of military capabilities against Iran. Not all of these options are mutually exclusive, nor do they represent a complete list of possible options, implications, and risks. And, the escalation of U.S.-Iran tensions has prompted Congress to assess its role in any decisions regarding whether to undertake military action against Iran, an issue that is discussed later in this report. The following discussion is based entirely on open-source materials.

- **Shipping protection.[51]** One option could be to replicate the 1987-88 "Operation Earnest Will" in which the United States reflagged Kuwaiti oil tankers and escorted them through the Gulf.[52] The operation responded to Iranian attacks on tankers carrying Gulf country oil exports during the Iran-Iraq War. In April 1988, an Iranian attack on the tanker convoys led to a one-day battle with the U.S. Navy in which much of Iran's naval force was destroyed in "Operation Praying Mantis." Operation Earnest Will was a unilateral U.S. operation, and it is possible that the Administration might try to recruit international partners in a 2019 version of this option. India, for example, has sent naval assets to the region to protect its shipping interests.[53] Suggesting that the Administration is attempting to implement this option, in late June, Secretary Pompeo visited Saudi Arabia, UAE, and several Asian states to recruit allies to contribute funds and military resources to a new maritime security and monitoring initiative for the Gulf.[54]
- **Operations against Iranian allies or proxies**. The Administration might decide to take action against Iran's allies or proxies, such as Iran-backed militias in Iraq. Such action could take the form of air operations, ground operations, special operations, or cyber and electronic warfare. Attacks on Iranian allies could be limited or expansive—intended to seriously degrade the military ability of the Iranian ally in question. Options to combat Iran's allies could be undertaken by U.S. forces, partner government forces, or both. On the other hand, such action has the potential to further inflame or harm the prospects for resolution of the regional conflicts in which Iranian allies operate.
- **Retaliatory Action against Key Targets and Facilities.** The United States retains the option to undertake air and missile strikes, as well as special operations and cyber and electronic warfare against Iranian targets, such as IRGC Navy vessels in the Gulf, nuclear facilities, military bases, ports, and any number of other targets within Iran itself.[55]

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[50] Kathleen J. McInnis (2005) Extended deterrence: The U.S. credibility gap in the Middle East, The Washington Quarterly, 28:3, 169-186, DOI: 10.1162/0163660054026489.

[51] For more information, see CRS Report IB87145. Persian Gulf: U.S. Military Operations, by Ronald O'Rourke. http://cdbapps/CRSx/productdetails/147092; and U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings. The Tanker War, by Ronald O'Rourke. https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/1988/may/tanker-war.

[52] Bradley Peniston. "Operation Earnest Will." http://www.navybook.com/no-higher-honor/timeline/operation-earnest-will/.

[53] Economic Times (India), June 20, 2019. https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/to-ensure-security-of-indian-vessels-navy-deploys-warships-in-gulf-of-oman-persian-gulf/articleshow/69879830.cms.

[54] "U.S., Increasing Heat on Tehran, Places Sanctions on Iranian Leaders." *New York Times*, June 25, 2019.

[55] "Trump Administration Prepares Multiple Military Options for Iran, Including Airstrikes and Setting Up Ground Invasion." *Newsweek*, May 14, 2019.

- **Blockade.** Another option could be to establish a naval and/or air quarantine of Iran. Iran has periodically, including in the latest round of tensions, threatened to block the vital Strait of Hormuz. Some observers have in past confrontations raised the prospect of a U.S. closure of the Strait or other waterways to Iranian commerce.[56] Under international law, blockades are acts of war.
- **Invasion.** Although apparently far from current consideration because of the potential risks and costs, a U.S. invasion of Iran to oust its regime is among the options. Press reports in May 2019 indicated that the Administration was considering adding more than 100,000 military forces to the Gulf to deter Iran from any attacks.[57] Such an option, if exercised, might be interpreted as potentially enhancing the U.S. ability to conduct ground attacks inside Iran, although most military experts indicate that a U.S. invasion and/or occupation of Iran would require many more U.S. forces than those cited.[58] Iran's population is about 80 million, and its armed forces collectively number about 525,000, including 350,000 regular military and 125,000 IRGC forces.[59] There has been anti-government unrest in Iran over the past ten years, but there is no indication that there is substantial support inside Iran for a U.S. invasion to change Iran's regime.

Resource Implications of Military Operations

Without a more detailed articulation of how the military might be employed to accomplish U.S. objectives vis-a-vis Iran, and a reasonable level of confidence about how any conflict might proceed, it is difficult to assess with any precision the likely fiscal costs of a military campaign, or even just heightened presence. Still, any course of action listed in this report is likely to incur significant additional costs. Factors that might influence the level of expenditure required to conduct operations include, but are not limited to, the following:

- **The number of additional forces,** and associated equipment, deployed to the Persian Gulf or the CENTCOM theater more broadly. In particular, deploying forces and equipment from the continental United States (if required) would likely add to the costs of such an operation due to the logistical requirements of moving troops and materiel.
- **The mission set that U.S. forces are required to prosecute and its associated intensity.** For example, some options leading to an increase of the U.S. posture in the Persian Gulf for deterrence or containment purposes might require upgrading existing facilities or new construction of facilities and installations. By contrast, options that require the prosecution of combat operations would likely result in significant supplemental and/or overseas contingency operations requests, particularly if U.S. forces are involved in ground combat or post-conflict stabilization operations.
- **The time required to accomplish U.S. objectives.** As demonstrated by operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the period of anticipated involvement in a

[56] Emanuele Ottolenghi. "Only Crippling Sanctions Will Stop Iran. New York Times, March 2, 2012. https://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/03/opinion/only-crippling-sanctions-will-stop-iran.html?partner=rss&emc=rss.

[57] White House Reviews Military Plans against Iran, in Echoes of Iraq War. New York Times, May 13, 2019. https://www.nbcnews.com/news/military/u-s-sending-1-000-troops-middle-east-amid-heightened-n1018556.

[58] "A conflict with Iran would not be like the Iraq War. It would be worse." Washington Post, May 14, 2019.

[59] IISS. The Military Balance: 2019. "Iran."

contingency is a critical basis for any cost analysis. On one hand, a large stabilizing or occupying ground force to perform stabilization and reconstruction operations, for example, would likely require the expenditure of significant U.S. resources. On the other hand, a limited strike that does not result in conflict escalation would likely be relatively less expensive to the United States.

Congressional Responses

Members of Congress have responded in various ways to increased tensions with Iran and to related questions of authorization for the use of military force.

Some Members have expressed concern about the legal justification for military operations in or against Iran. On June 22, Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT) cast doubt on the notion of a "limited strike," saying that "[attacking] another country with bombs … that's an act of warfare" and said that an attack on Iran would be, in his view, "unconstitutional."[60] Although Presidents have long asserted wide-ranging authority to unilaterally initiate the use of military force, no legislation has been enacted authorizing the use of force against Iran, and several measures include provisions specifying that such authorization is not being granted.[61] For instance, Section 9026 of Division C of H.R. 2740, as engrossed in the House on June 19, 2019, states that "Nothing in this Act may be construed as authorizing the use of force against Iran."

Other Members have positioned themselves as more generally supportive of broad discretion for the Administration discretion to act. Senator Tom Cotton (R-AR) said on June 16th that "these unprovoked attacks on commercial shipping warrant a retaliatory military strike" and argued that the president had the authority to order such an attack.[62] The day before, Senator Lindsey Graham (R-SC) made a similar argument, stating that "enough is enough" and called on President Trump to "be prepared to make Iran pay a heavy price by targeting their naval vessels and, if necessary, their oil refineries."[63]

President Trump said in a June 24 interview that he believes he has the authority to direct strikes against Iran, and said that "I do like keeping them [Congress] abreast, but I don't have to do it, legally."[64] On June 25, he tweeted that "any attack by Iran on anything American will be met with great and overwhelming force. In some areas, overwhelming will mean obliteration."[65]

At a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing on April 10, 2019, Secretary of State Pompeo, when asked if the Administration considers the use of force against Iran as authorized, answered that he would defer to Administration legal experts on that question. However, he suggested that the 2001 authorization for use of military force (AUMF, P.L. 107-40) against those responsible

[60] Grace Segers, "Bernie Sanders says Trump 'helped create the crisis' in Iran," CBS News, June 22, 2019.

[61] Some analysts have suggested that the 1973 War Powers Resolution (P.L. 93-148), which requires the President to notify Congress when U.S. armed forces are introduced into hostilities or situations of imminent hostilities and withdraw those forces within 60 to 90 days unless Congress authorizes such action, might also represent a check on the President's authority under Article II of the Constitution. Scott Anderson, "When Does the President Think He Can Go To War With Iran?" *Lawfare*, June 24, 2019. For more, see CRS Report R42699, *The War Powers Resolution: Concepts and Practice*, by Matthew C. Weed.

[62] Nicholas Wu, "Trump says he doesn't want war, but Sen. Cotton called for 'retaliatory strikes' on Iran," *USA Today*, June 16, 2019.

[63] Lindsey Graham, Twitter, June 15, 2019. https://twitter.com/LindseyGrahamSC/status/1140063250438078466.

[64] Saagar Enjeti and Jordan Fabian, "EXCLUSIVE: Trump: I do not need congressional approval to strike Iran," *The Hill*, June 24, 2019.

[65] President Trump (@realDonaldTrump), Twitter, June 25, 2019, 7:42 AM.

for the September 11 terrorist attacks could potentially apply to Iran, asserting that "[Iran has] hosted Al Qaida. They have permitted Al Qaida to transit their country. [There's] no doubt there is a connection between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Al Qaida. Period. Full stop." Other analyses have characterized the relationship between Iran and Al Qaeda as "an on-again, off-again marriage of convenience pockmarked by bouts of bitter acrimony."[66] Section 9025 of H.R. 2740 would repeal the 2001 AUMF within 240 days of enactment.[67]

Additionally, Members seeking to prevent the Administration from pursuing military action against Iran have introduced several measures prohibiting the use of funds for such operations:

- The Prevention of Unconstitutional War with Iran Act of 2019 (H.R. 2354/S. 1039) would prevent the use of any funds for "kinetic military operations in or against Iran" except in case of an imminent threat.
- Representative Jim Himes introduced an amendment (House Rules Committee Amendment 88) to the House defense appropriations bill (Division C of H.R. 2470) that would have stated that no funds appropriated by the act "may be used to engage any members of the Armed Forces or any weapons or military equipment in any conflict or war in Iran." The amendment was not made in order.
- Several dozen Representatives wrote to the chairman and ranking member of the House Armed Services Committee, urging them to "include language in the FY20 NDAA prohibiting U.S. offensive military operations in the Republic of Iran and prohibiting direct action against Iran or its proxies without Congressional authorization."[68]

In June 2019, Senator Udall introduced an amendment (S.Amdt. 576) to the Senate FY2020 National Defense Authorization Act (S. 1790) that would prohibit the use of any funds "to conduct hostilities against the Government of Iran, against the Armed Forces of Iran, or in the territory of Iran, except pursuant to an Act or a joint resolution of Congress specifically authorizing such hostilities."[69] The Udall Amendment was defeated by a roll call vote 50-40.

Possible Issues for Congress

Given ongoing tensions with Iran, Members are likely to continue to assess and perhaps try to shape the congressional role in any decisions regarding whether to commit U.S. forces to potential hostilities. In assessing its authorities in this context, Congress might consider, among other things, the following:

- Does the President require prior authorization from Congress before initiating hostilities with Iran? If so, what actions, under what circumstances, ought to be covered by such an authorization?
- If the executive branch were to initiate and then sustain hostilities against Iran without congressional authorization, what are the implications for the

[66] Ned Price, "Why Mike Pompeo Released More bin Laden Files," *Atlantic*, November 8, 2017. See also Barbara Slavin, "Expediency and betrayal: Iran's relationship with al-Qaeda," *Al-Monitor Iran Pulse*, September 7, 2018.

[67] For background, see CRS Report R43983, *2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force: Issues Concerning Its Continued Application*, by Matthew C. Weed.

[68] Letter from Anna G. Eshoo and Thomas Massie to House Armed Services Committee Chairman Adam Smith and Ranking Member Mac Thornberry, "Prohibit U.S. Military Operations in Iran in the FY20 NDAA," June 2019.

[69] For more on arguments around congressional attempts to limit military action via appropriations, see CRS Report R41989, *Congressional Authority to Limit Military Operations*, by Jennifer K. Elsea, Michael John Garcia, and Thomas J. Nicola.

preservation of Congress's role, relative to that of the executive branch, in the war powers function? How, in turn, might the disposition of the war powers issue in connection with the situation with Iran affect the broader question of Congress's status as an equal branch of government, including the preservation and use of other congressional powers and prerogatives?

- The Iranian government may continue to take aggressive action short of directly threatening the United States and its territories while it continues policies opposed by the United States. What might be the international legal ramifications for undertaking a retaliatory, preventive, or preemptive strikes against Iran without a U.N. Security Council mandate?

Conflict with, or increased military activity in or around, Iran could generate significant financial costs. With that in mind, Congress could consider the following:

- The potential costs of heightened U.S. operations in the CENTCOM area of operations, particularly if they lead to full-scale war and significant post-conflict operations.
- The need for the United States to reconstitute its forces and capabilities, particularly in the aftermath of a major conflict.
- The impact of the costs of war and post conflict reconstruction on U.S. deficits and government spending.
- The costs of persistent military confrontation and/or a conflict in the Gulf region to the global economy.
- The extent to which regional allies, and the international community more broadly, might contribute forces or resources to a military campaign or its aftermath.

Figure 1. Iran, the Persian Gulf, and the Region

Sources: Created by CRS using data from the U.S. Department of State, ESRI, and GADM.

Appendix A. Selected Statements by U.S. and Iranian Leaders on Recent Tensions[70]

Date	US Statements	Iranian Statements
April 22	Pompeo: "We have watched Iran have diminished power as a result of our campaign. Their capacity to wreak harm around the world is absolutely clearly diminished."	
April 24		FM Zarif: "It is not a crisis yet, but it is a dangerous situation. Accidents, plotted accidents are possible.… The plot is to push Iran into taking action. And then use that."
April 30		Rouhani: ""America's decision that Iran's oil exports must reach zero is a wrong and mistaken decision, and we won't let this decision be executed and operational…In future months, the Americans themselves will see that we will continue our oil exports."
May 5	National Security Advisor John Bolton statement: "In response to a number of troubling and escalatory indications and warnings, the United States is deploying the USS Abraham Lincoln Carrier Strike Group and a bomber task force to the U.S. Central Command region to send a clear and unmistakable message to the Iranian regime that any attack on United States interests or on those of our allies will be met with unrelenting force. The United States is not seeking war with the Iranian regime, but we are fully prepared to respond to any attack, whether by proxy, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, or regular Iranian forces."	
May 8		President Rouhani (via Twitter): "Starting today, Iran does not keep its enriched uranium and produced heavy water limited. The EU/E3+2 will face Iran's further actions if they can not fulfill their obligations within the next 60 days and secure Iran's interests. Win-Win conditions will be accepted."
May 9	President Trump: "I'd like to see [Iran] call me" to "make a deal, a fair deal"	
May 12		Rouhani: "The pressures by enemies is a war unprecedented in the history of our Islamic revolution ... but I do not despair and have great hope for the future and believe that we can move past these difficult conditions provided that we are united."

[70] The quotes in this table are from various public sources available to congressional clients from the authors upon request.

Date	US Statements	Iranian Statements
May 14		Supreme Leader Khamenei: "There won't be any war. The Iranian nation has chosen the path of resistance"
May 15	President Trump (via Twitter): "I'm sure that Iran will want to talk soon."	
May 19	President Trump (via Twitter): "If Iran wants to fight, that will be the official end of Iran. Never threaten the United States again!"	
May 20	President Trump (via Twitter): "Iran will call us if and when they are ever ready. In the meantime their economy continues to collapse—very sad for the Iranian people!"	Rouhani: "Today's situation is not suitable for talks and our choice is resistance only."
May 27	President Trump: "I really believe that Iran would like to make a deal, and I think that's very smart of them, and I think that's a possibility to happen…It has a chance to be a great country with the same leadership,…We aren't looking for regime change—I just want to make that clear. We are looking for no nuclear weapons."	
May 29	NSA Bolton: "I think it is clear these [tanker attacks] were naval mines almost certainly from Iran….There is no doubt in anybody's mind in Washington who was responsible for this."	Supreme Leader Khamenei (via Twitter): "We won't negotiate with Americans. Because there's no use negotiating and it's even harmful. Otherwise we have no problems negotiating with others & with Europeans."
June 2	Pompeo: "We are prepared to engage in conversation with no preconditions, we are ready to sit down" with Iran.	
June 13	President Trump (via Twitter): "While I very much appreciate [Japanese Prime Minister] Abe going to Iran to meet with Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, I personally feel it is too soon to even think about making a deal. They are not ready, and neither are we!" Pompeo: "Iran is lashing out because the regime wants our successful maximum pressure campaign lifted… Our policy remains an economic and diplomatic effort to bring Iran back to the negotiating table at the right time, to encourage a comprehensive deal that addresses the broad range of threats—threats today apparent for all the world to see—to peace and security."	Supreme Leader Khamenei (via Twitter): "We have no doubt in [PM Abe's] goodwill and seriousness; but regarding what you mentioned from U.S. president, I don't consider Trump as a person deserving to exchange messages with; I have no response for him & will not answer him."
June 17	President Trump, on alleged Iranian attacks in the Gulf: "So far, it's been very minor"	
June 20	President Trump: "I find it hard to believe [Iran shooting down a U.S. drone] was intentional…I have a feeling that it was a mistake made by somebody that shouldn't have been doing what they did."	

June 21	President Trump: "I'm not looking for war, and if there is, it'll be obliteration like you've never seen before."
June 22	President Trump: "We're not going to have Iran have a nuclear weapon. And when they agree to that, they are going to have a wealthy country, they're going to be so happy and I'm going to be their best friend."

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