MEMORANDUM FOR SCUSA 73

05 November 2022

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SUBJECT: The Middle East: The Future of United States Involvement

1. **Issue:** The purpose of this memorandum is to propose policy options for the United States to consider in mitigating Iranian disruptive behaviors in the Middle East.

2. **Strategic Analysis:**
   The Islamization of Iranian law since 1979 forms the basis of its national character. Western powers and neighboring nuclear-armed states pose a great threat to the Iranian regime, driving their interest in regime preservation. Iran directly views the United States’ encroaching influence in the region and alliance with Israel as a threat to the viability of their regime. Its main political and strategic motivations are regime maintenance and ensuring national security through increased nuclear capacity and military development.

   Iran’s capabilities hinge on asymmetric means, with territorial integrity guaranteed via the pursuit of nuclear weapons. Iran exploits grievances and common identities as well as creating or supporting extremist political organizations. The IRGC numbers 150,000 and operates by training and equipping various non-state actors throughout the region. It exploits U.S. sanctions to gain more comprehensive control over the formal and informal sectors of the Iranian economy. Iran has the ability to produce multiple nuclear warheads in a few weeks while miniaturization of these warheads, to be mounted on Iran’s various IRMBs, can likely be completed within a year and a half.

   Prior to the JCPOA, Iran had the capability to produce eight to ten nuclear bombs using their existing stockpile of enriched uranium and approximately 20,000 centrifuges. Just three years after the deal’s creation, Iran could produce weapons-grade highly enriched uranium and plutonium, the two fissile materials used in nuclear weapon development. In May 2018, the Trump Administration announced withdrawal from the JCPOA. Current attempts at a new deal have failed, and, as of September 2022, Iran has 2,782 advanced centrifuges and their nuclear program could develop weapons within two years.

3. **Relevant National Interests:**
   a. Protecting strategic partners via nuclear non-proliferation
   b. Retaining regional balance of power
   c. Opposing strategic competitors in the region
   d. Promoting human rights/democracy

4. **Strategic Options:**
   a. *Establish a nuclear deal with Iran*
      1. Pro: Maintains peace and still allows Iran to develop, allows monitoring of Iran
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2. Con: Israel is not a fan; Cannot guarantee Iran will uphold their end of the deal; Iran is not interested; Not a solution - more of a temporary fix towards a part of the problem

b. Kinetic Strikes against Iranian disruptive actors
   1. Pro: More certainty in the destruction of nuclear facilities. Ability to enforce a timeline.
   2. Con: Proxy backlash across Middle Eastern nations. Major risk of escalation.

c. Multilateral partnerships with other nations against Iranian disruptive behaviors
   1. Pro: Diplomatic and safe; shares the political burden
   2. Con: Takes time and effort - requires a lot of patience

5. Recommendation and Implementation:
   Diplomatic Pressure: Soft Power
   1. The primary goal is to renegotiate the JCPOA so that Iran feels comfortable both signing and abiding by it. The way this could be most effectively accomplished is through the removal of the IRGC as a terrorist organization from the legislation.

Increased Intelligence Action
   1. Increased intelligence activity in partnership with regional actors Azerbaijan, Israel, and the U.K. to monitor nuclear weapons development via Imagery/Geospatial intelligence; Open Source intelligence; Human intelligence; Signals (Communications, Wiretapping); Measurement intelligence; Technical intelligence; and Counter-intelligence.

Military Action: Hard Power
   1. Maintaining the strategic assets close to the border and increasing military presence to the area.
   2. Establishing an Air Defense system in Iraq and Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain to confront threats from Iran.
   3. Conducting joint training with regional partners such as Bahrain and Iraq.
   4. Monitoring proxy groups in the surrounding region and reducing the supply of resources from Iran.

Economic Incentivization
   1. Putting pressure on Iran’s economic allies in India, South Korea, and Russia, which have assisted Iran in evading current sanctions.
   2. Assist in combating money-laundering by facilitating collaboration between Middle Eastern nations, particularly Turkey and UAE, to strengthen oversight and regulation on money laundering and other financial crimes.
   3. Emphasizing the benefits of lifting sanctions for their economy and population.
   4. Emphasizing their sinking economy in the region and the potential threat by the other developing economic powers such as Saudi Arabia and UAE.

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