

**THE US-IRAN RELATIONS
AFTER THE AL-AQSA
STORM**



Emine Gözde Toprak



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The US-Iran Relations After the Al-Aqsa Storm

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INTRODUCTION

Relations between the US and the Islamic Republic of Iran have been fraught with problems right from the start. The issues were generated by Iran's so-called 'rogue state' behavior, including hostage taking, proxy warfare, association with terrorist activities and its nuclear program, and US bullying responses to it. As a result, several flashpoints have developed since 1979. A series of events for over 40 years culminated in a default setting of hostility and made it difficult for each to deviate from this default setting. In recent years, the hostility swiftly increased under the Trump administration since the US withdrew from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2018, followed by fresh and draconian economic sanctions. It peaked in 2020 when a well-known Iranian general named Qasem Soleimani, the head of the IRGC Quds Force, was assassinated by the US. This brought the situation between the US and Iran dangerously near to war. Still, they managed the risk as it has been for years.

On assuming office, the Biden administration showed a willingness to rejoin the JCPOA to defuse the tension. However, he soon discovered that Trump's actions had reinforced the default setting. By 2022, the unfavorable geopolitical and domestic political environment in the US and Iran also returned after several developments took place both at the international and domestic levels. Developments such as the election of hardliner Ebrahim Raisi as Iran's new president, the advancement in Iran's nuclear program, the initiation of the Ukraine War, Iran's precise posture on the side of Russia, the outbreak of the Mahsa Amini protests in Iran, and the result of US mid-term elections continue to buttress the default antagonism between US and Iran. However, over the past three years, Biden has avoided moves that would increase its commitment in the region

against Iranian nuclear escalation and its aggressive/ lethal regional activities. The United States has tried to decrease its commitment to the Middle East for a couple of years now in attempting to create an order in such a way as to make risky interventions unnecessary in the future. Its focus is mainly directed at great powers, China and Russia, challenging the US order. Within these contexts, the Biden administration's attempts to neutralize Iran's nuclear threat through secret talks and months of back-channel diplomacy did not yield any meaningful progress other than an agreement on the exchange of several prisoners and an informal de-escalation deal for Tehran curtailing its uranium enrichment to 60%.

The Biden Administration's unwillingness to deal forcefully with Iran faces dramatic testing on October 7 and resuming subsequent events. Arguably, the two states are on the brink of war again as a result of the Al-Aqsa Storm Operation launched by Iran-backed militant group Hamas on October 7. The assault sparked the Gaza war. Although much will depend on the duration of the war, whether it will expand, and the scale of the destruction, the current war is not likely to alter the regular patterns of US and Iran relations, which is controlled hostility. Seeking to explain why this is the case, this article sheds light on historical events. As the historical examples will demonstrate, three logics shape US policy towards Iran historically. Strategic imperatives related to international structure, Iran's deterrence, and US presidents' electoral incentives are spotted as the three main reasons why the US has not resorted to military options for over forty years despite its obsession with Iran.¹ From this point of view, the Al-Aqsa Storm Operation may have been one of the latest developments that may drag US-Iran relations once again towards a hostile path without the possibility of a shooting war.

But it has the potential to 'kill' or at least 'freeze' the nuclear dialogue.

Flashpoints behind the hostile default setting between the US and Iran

Regarding U.S.-Iran relations, this is not the first time a catastrophic collapse has hit political processes. The nature of relations can mainly be characterized by cycles of antagonism and misunderstandings. Arguably, the two parties have been at quasi-war with each other since 1979. That continued animosity was due to several reasons.

From Iran's point of view, the United States disregards the human rights of Iranians, aids their adversaries, and conducts direct interventions. Although America's anti-Iran stance started with the 1979 revolution, the Islamic Republic's anti-Americanism/anti-West position is rooted mainly in what happened before 1979. One can see that the leader of the 1979 revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini, whose initial political publication in 1944, referred to the "European" impact on Reza Shah. In 1964, Khomeini identified America as the specific source of problems experienced by Muslims due to legal immunity granted to US personnel in Iran, a US-driven domestic policy, and American support for Israel. What happened after the Revolution only reinforces this specific perception in Iran that continues till today. The actions of successive US governments, exemplified below, produced abundant evidence for Iran to support perception. This may illustrate the emergence of a vicious circle of mistrust and hostility between the two states. The 1953 US and British-instigated coup d'état in Iran still nurtures the anti-American position. The US supported Saddam Hussein in the Iran-Iraq War, described Iran as being part of an "axis of evil," launched the Stuxnet cyberattack on

Iranian nuclear facilities in 2009, and provided weapons for Saudi Arabia to fight a proxy war against Iran in Yemen. Since the establishment of the Islamic Republic, successive US administrations have portrayed Iran as a strategic threat. As a result, Iran was either a deliberate target of official foreign policies of the US or isolated deliberately within the US regional policies. For example, Iran was deliberately isolated in President George H. W. Bush's 'New World Order'. Bill Clinton tried to contain Iran under the official foreign policy 'dual containment'. Iran joined Iraq and North Korea as a part of President George W. Bush's axis of evil. It was identified with the new global security threats of terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Obama signed the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2010. Lastly, Trump's obsession with Tehran is still so fresh that I find it unnecessary to remind. The most significant action of the Trump administration was the decision to assassinate Qasem Soleimani.

From the US side of the story, as briefly mentioned above, Iran's so-called rogue state behavior caused the animosity. Without involving the problematic and controversial sides of the term, in its most straightforward meaning, "rogue states" are defined as aggressive states that aim to disrupt the balance of power within the international system, either by acquiring weapons of mass destruction or by sponsoring international terrorism. The critical aspect of the concept of "rogue states" pertains to the classification by the United States of these states as critical threats to the stability of the international system.

Iran emerged as an anti-status quo power after the Revolution. To this end, it has pursued hostile and aggressive acts toward the US, Israel, and any other countries that are simply

maintaining economic, security, and political relations with them. Iran engages in terror attacks in its confrontation with the United States, including bombing, assassination, hijacking, kidnapping, and hostage-taking; acts of aggression, such as attacking the world's largest oil processing facilities in Saudi Arabia in 2019; acts of threats, such as breaching the freedom of navigation and global economic stability by mining and detaining commercial vessels in and around the Strait of Hormuz. Reportedly, Iran has executed or planned terrorist attacks on five out of seven continents to this date.

To name a few, on October 23, 1983, Lebanese Hezbollah targeted the US Marine Corps barracks that were a part of a multinational force of troops by a suicide bomber in Beirut, killing 241 US service members, most of them Marines. This attack remains one of the deadliest days for American military personnel since the Second World War. According to the declassified intelligence², the Iranian government was directly involved. Intercepted diplomatic message by US National Security Agency on September 26, 1983, a few weeks before the Beirut bombing, showed the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) in Iran contacted Ali Akbar Mohtashemi, the country's ambassador in Syria and ordered him to direct Husayn al-Musawi, the leader of Islamic Amal (a precursor to Hezbollah), to carry out "spectacular action against the United States Marines" and the multinational coalition in Lebanon. The interception³ also enabled the US officials to trace the movement of money (more than 1 million dollars) from the government of Iran to the Iranian Embassy in Lebanon, which was used by the terrorist bombing in question. In short, Iran ordered and funded the 1983 Beirut bombings.



Other executed or attempted terrorist attacks targeting directly US or US allies and interests which are suspected or proven to be linked with Iran are the 1983 Kuwait bombings targeting the US and French embassies, the 1992 and the 1994 Buenos Aires Bombings, 1994 Attempted Bombing of Israeli Embassy in Bangkok, the 1996 Khobar Towers Bombings, conducting of attacks on coalition forces by Shia militias and planting roadside bombs⁴ in Iraq against US troops⁵ starting from⁶ 2004, 2008 Plotting both US and Israeli Embassy Attack in Azerbaijan, 2012 Burgas bus bombing in Bulgaria, Attempted Hezbollah's Attacks on US and Israeli targets in Türkiye and Kenya in 2011 and 2012 respectively.

According to *the 2020 edition of the Outlaw Regime report*⁷ by the US Department of State, Iran is held responsible for more than 25 land attack cruise missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles launched against Saudi Arabia's oil facilities in the year 2019 alone. As documented in the same report, the Iranian government has planted explosive devices on six commercial ships two Saudi, one UAE, two Norwegian, and one Japanese-owned ship; downed a US drone that was operating over the Persian Gulf, and detained a British tanker and its crew without legal justification for over two months in 2019. Iran launched ballistic missiles at US and coalition forces situated at Ain Al-Assad Air Base in Iraq at the beginning of 2020. In addition to this, Iran's dogged pursuit of its nuclear program and its history of denial, delay, and deliberate deception in its engagement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) resulted in reinforcing hostile default settings between the US. All in all, Iran's entire modus operandi in its foreign and national security policies ensured its place within a small group of states that have been considered 'rogue,' 'outlaw,' pariah, 'terrorist sponsor of states', and marginalized by the international community.

Why did not Iran confront more decisive military action from the US?

As is shown above, the decades of mistrust and hostility developed and hardened over a forty-year relationship between Tehran and Washington. Under any circumstances, a few of these incidents mentioned above are so intense that they could easily trigger a conflict between any two countries. Most people still consider such a conflict to be inevitable at some point. Still, the war did not take place between the two. As a regional power, it is understandable Iran does not want to confront the United States on a conventional battlefield. For Iran and its allies, the goal is to neutralize the presence and power of the US in the Middle East without entering a full-scale war through asymmetric battle. But why the United States did not wage a war against a country, according to⁸ in-house Pentagon history of the occupation of Iraq, which is directly or indirectly responsible for American military deaths more than any other entity in the Middle East? Utilizing documents and memoirs, the US logic will be identified on why the US maintained its relations with Iran at the level of controlled hostility.

Understanding the US actions towards Iran

1) The influence of strategic imperatives related to international structure

1980's- Iran is strategically too important to ignore in Cold War dynamics.

The 1983 Beirut Bombings, later determined as the largest non-nuclear explosion, was one of the historical moments that could have prompted US military action on Iran based

on its involvement in the orchestration of the attack. However, the Cold War strategic imperatives have influenced the reaction of the Reagan administration to the Marine barracks bombing. Historical documents show that the Cold War strategic equation bound the Reagan Administration⁹. In late 1980, the State Department advised the incoming Reagan Administration that the most effective approach for "safeguarding Western access to Gulf oil and resisting Soviet expansion" was to ensure stability within Iran's leadership. In June 1981, a detailed report was produced for the State Department Senior Interdepartmental Group on Iran's "territorial integrity and sovereignty of an independent, albeit Islamic revolutionary Iran" as crucial to US security strategy in southwest Asia. In this line of logic, albeit Islamic and anti-American, but also a robust and strongly anti-communist Iranian regime that repressed leftist political groups was certainly not the least favorable regime for American policymakers. According to the US National Security Council, military intervention can result in political turmoil, power vacuums, and social instability. These were the ideal conditions for the Soviet meddling in the Islamic Republic. In June 1983, another document warned the Reagan Administration for his Security Strategy for the Near East and South Asia, stating the US vital interest might be threatened by internal unrest and upheaval among Shia populations in Arab countries who are loyal to Khomeini in the event of military intervention inside Iran. Ultimately, further turmoil in these countries would have been present for the Soviets.

After all, from a simple geopolitical standpoint, the Revolution led to the US losing a crucial partner in a vital region at a time when allies were critical to maintaining the global power balance amid the continuing Cold War. Further alienating the new regime could result in losing Iran to the East bloc altogether. After the

barracks bombing, strategic imperatives related to the Cold War seemed to be the mainstay of why President Reagan refrained from military retaliation against Iran.

The 1990s- Iran is the lesser evil compared to Iraq.

The flashpoint of the 1990s can be selected as the 1996 Khobar Towers bombing. The Khobar Towers bombing occurred in 1996 as a terrorist attack on a US Air Force housing complex in the town of Khobar, near Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, on June 25, 1996. Nineteen US soldiers were killed, and around 500 individuals (most of them Saudis) were injured. The Khobar Towers complex was home to 2,000 United States military personnel. These service members were stationed there to conduct patrols of the southern Iraq no-fly zone, established following the Persian Gulf War of 1990-91. The bombing of Khobar Towers stands as the deadliest attack on the United States between the Beirut Marine barracks tragedy of 1983 and the events of September 11, 2001.

As then-the deputy assistant secretary of defense for the Near East and South Asia, Bruce Riedel, pointed out¹⁰ the Saudis had the information but were hesitant to disclose their information since they believed that Clinton would authorize retaliation against Iran if he were certain of Tehran's involvement¹¹. Clinton wanted a serious military response, and the Pentagon had a plan that entailed a heavy bombardment of Iranian military targets in the Gulf with air, missile, and naval attacks. But all the evidence the US had was circumstantial at a time when Clinton wanted a military reprisal. It arguably prevented Clinton from taking military action against Iran. However, Clinton chose to resort to military action against Iraq two times during his presidency. On the other hand, Iran, which was involved in US "dual



containment" strategy along with Iraq, did not come under the target.

The policy vision of Clinton's team towards Iran by the time Clinton took office will explain why this is the case. During the 1990s, the US was afforded greater flexibility in the Middle East due to the Soviet Union's removal from US strategic considerations. With the end of the Cold War, the US could easily project its power in the region and deal with the threats to the US and its allies' interests. Iran and Iraq remained to present serious challenges to the United States and the balance of power in the region in the 1990s. During the 1980s, the United States attempted to pit these countries against each other; however, Iraq resulted from the 1980-1988 war with Iran as the more dominant nation, unrestrained by any of its surrounding countries. This imbalance enabled Baghdad to invade Kuwait in 1990 and declare the oil-rich city-state as its 19th province. As a result, according to Martin Indyk, special assistant to the US President at the National Security Council, the Clinton Administration determined that there is a significant difference in the threats posed by Iran and Iraq¹². In his own words, Indyk pointed out in 1994 that "Iran today does not present the threat that Iraq did to our interests some five years ago. And our challenge is to prevent Iran five years from now from becoming the kind of threat that Iraq was five years ago." 1990's Iran was a lesser evil compared to Iraq. In that sense, dual containment does not mean the duplication of policies. This is the reason why NSC staff chose "active containment" as a path to deal with Iran which did not resort to punitive military action; while the NSC favored "aggressive containment" for Saddam Hussein's Iraq which commands occasional military resort. Clinton's Iran policy will be softened more with the election of Mohammad Khatami as the Iranian president who publicly pledged to end Iran's provocative foreign policy.

2) The influence of Iranian deterrence

2000s- Iran started to establish a certain level of deterrence.

The Bush administration had no explicit policy toward Tehran till the progress of Iran's nuclear program was revealed in 2003-2004. After that, Washington adopted a deliberate policy. With the revelation of Iran's nuclear program, the main challenge Iran posed shifted from its support of terror to the nuclear area. The early stages of the nuclear issue (between 2002-2006) were resolved until Ahmedinejad was elected as the Iranian president. Ahmedinejad's reckless rhetoric and Iran's unwillingness to cooperate with the IAEA put the military option on the table for the United States. Bush, in his book *Decision Points*, writes of the military plan against Iran after Ahmadinejad's election: "I directed the Pentagon to study what would be necessary for a strike." He adds: "This would be to stop the bomb clock, at least temporarily." (p. 389-390). However, former CIA and National Security Agency chief Gen. Michael Hayden in the Bush administration said, "when we talked about this in the government, the consensus was that [attacking Iran] would guarantee that which we are trying to prevent – an Iran that will spare nothing to build nuclear weapons and that would build it in secret," This assessment revealed Iran achieved a certain level of deterrence through secretly built extensive nuclear activities and fuel cycle technologies against the United States.

Additionally, Iran put another strand in its deterrence capacity with proxy conflict through the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah War, in which Iran gave unprecedented military assistance to Hezbollah. The 2006 war underlined the perspective in the US and West that any direct war with Iran would be chaotic and violent

with considerable repercussions. As George W. Bush observed the result of war in his book *Decision Points*, "Israel's war against Hezbollah in Lebanon was another defining moment in the ideological struggle. While it remains fragile and still faces pressure from Syria, Lebanon's young democracy emerged stronger for having endured the test. The result for Israel was mixed. Its military campaign weakened Hezbollah and helped secure its border. At the same time, the Israelis' shaky military performance cost them international credibility." (p. 388).

After 2010- Iran reinforced its deterrence with nuclear and asymmetric capabilities.

Iran steadily developed its nuclear program throughout the 2010s. Even before the Nuclear Deal, Iran had a stockpile that could produce up to 10 nuclear weapons. According to the 2014 US Intelligence assessment, "Iran has the scientific, technical, and industrial capacity to produce nuclear weapons eventually. This makes the central issue its political will to do so". As repeatedly mentioned and underlined in our essays at IRAM, the nuclear threat posed by Iran today is much closer than at any other time in history. Iran is one decision behind being a nuclear-weapon state. Trump decided to withdraw from the JCPOA that allows Iran to restart its nuclear program and move much closer to an actual weapons capability. At this moment, Iran has achieved a nuclear threshold state status, which is an indigenous ability to manufacture a nuclear bomb within a relatively short time. This is not a matter of day or night. Yet, Iran maximized its security by achieving threshold capability. Iran, on the one hand, possesses indigenous uranium fuel cycle capabilities; on the other hand, large and

increasingly sophisticated ballistic missile and space launch programs.

In addition to nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities, Iran has developed serious asymmetric capabilities since 1979. After 1979, Iran adopted a revolutionary security doctrine that deviates significantly from conventional approaches. This model is unique in nature. As part of it, Iran has established or supported a network of allies and partners throughout the region to forward defense and project political influence over the past four decades. These include the Hezbollah Movement in Lebanon, the Ansarullah movement - better known as the Houthis - in Yemen, and key elements of the Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU) in Iraq and paramilitary organizations in Palestine. Such groups receive ideological guidance, political backing, financial assistance, military instruction, weaponry, and intelligence sharing with Iran. The Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), which operates beyond the country's borders, and the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) play a significant role in managing asymmetrical warfare. In this way, Iran managed to keep the regime alive, consolidated control over strategic areas in the region, and yielded interests.

In Sept. 2019, Ayatollah Ahmad Alamolhoda, the Friday Prayer Imam of Mashhad and Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's representative in the city, pointed out the current geostrategic position of Iran built over the years by comparing its status in the 1980s: "39 years ago, [the Iraqis] launched attacks from our western and southwestern borders. Within a few days, 1,500 km of our country faced enemy aggression," he said. "But today, Iran encompasses more than its physical borders. The Iraqi 'popular mobilization,' Ansarullah [the Houthis] in Yemen, the Syrian National Front, the Palestine Islamic Jihad, Hamas in Palestine, and Hizballah in



Lebanon all represent Iran.” Currently, the IRGC-QF operates across the Middle East and has executed or planned policies that are mainly against the US and its allies’ interests. Both by asymmetric, nuclear, and ballistic capabilities, Iran, which knew US military power was unmatched, raised the costs of an attack on itself. This is the equation each post-2010 US presidents have to deal with.

3) The influence of political incentives

Since the hostage crisis, Americans have held unfavorable views of Iran in large numbers and for long periods¹³. The noteworthy significance and consistent nature of the perceived Iranian threat among voters, whether real or imagined, provides US officials with genuine cause for concern. Drawing on these historical examples, the electoral consideration also shaped how the US responded to Iran and its policies.

Event 1: the 1979 Hostage Crisis

In his book *Crisis: The Last Year of the Carter Presidency*, Hamilton Jordan pointed out that top aides in the Carter administration pondered one query: 'How will this affect the campaign?' upon hearing news of the embassy's seizure in Washington. In the same book again, we see that Carter's Chief of Staff admitted and said that 'the hostages and the election were woven together in my mind. When I wasn't thinking about Kennedy, I was thinking about Khomeini; when I wasn't thinking about Khomeini, I was thinking about Kennedy. Public opinion and pressure shaped the US' Iran policy since, as one veteran of several administrations argued, 'the residual anger that so many Americans feel toward Iran for those 444 days has colored every decision made about Iran ever since'. In his book *All Fall Down:*

America's Tragic Encounter with Iran, Gary Sick affirmed that another senior NSC adviser later concurred that if Carter had remained passive, it would have resulted in an electoral disaster for him. Carter finally followed the advice of hawkish advisors, such as Zbigniew Brzezinski. The re-election phase commanded US presidents to be tough enough on Iran since the hostage crisis and crises unfolding year after year placed the Iranian issue in the thorny category of foreign policy issues of the US. As a result, the President had to be more hawkish in dealing with Iran for the electoral incentives. However, as the Vietnam War casts a shadow on Carter's decision to embroil the US in another war, coercive/punitive actions should also be measured for re-election.

Event 2: Trump's calling-off retaliatory airstrikes against Iranian targets

This one of the most recent events illustrates the above point that there is a strong connection between electoral politics and dealings with the Iranian government in the US. As a response to Tehran's hostile actions, which are part of escalatory acts between Iran and the US resulting from the maximum pressure campaign of the Trump administration, Trump was on board to launch retaliator airstrikes. However, President Trump was reportedly warned if he got the United States embroiled in a war, he could 'kiss his chances of re-election goodbye.'¹⁴ Apparently, Trump has listened to the skeptics and canceled the airstrikes against Iranian targets at the eleventh hour.

Event 3: The Soleimani strike

When we look at the decision-making process that led to Trump's decision to neutralize Qasem Soleimani, individuals involved in the presidential campaign had guessed that the

decision was a maneuver intended to generate a political boost before his impeachment trial that began in the US Senate on January 16, 2020. Senator Lindsey Graham cautioned President Trump before the attack that "with the election approaching," he should be thinking carefully about the consequences of such action. Graham's exact words were, "With the election coming, you've got to think about how you respond and how you expect Iran to respond."¹⁵ Reportedly, the President has objected and argued that the assault would gain political popularity.

The survey was conducted from 6th to 7th January, soon after the drone attack ordered by President Donald Trump in Iraq. The polling data revealed that 53% of adults in the US deem Trump's approach to Iran unfavorable¹⁶. Moreover, according to the survey, as Donald Trump predicted, his overall popularity did not soar but remained stable following the attack. Trump's subsequent decision to de-escalate the increasing crisis with Iran through back-channel diplomacy may have much to do with the polling data, indicating that his biggest asset may not be his political instincts. The Soleimani strike, the use of force, was irresistible for Trump in a re-election year against Iranian escalatory actions, which reached its peak when Iraqi militias sieged the US embassy in Iraq. De-escalation moves after the strike was also irresistible, bound by the public's distaste for a military conflict that could result in casualties. Controlled hostility shown towards Iran by successive presidents remains the name of play between the US and Iran.

Conclusion: How will Al-Aqsa Storm affect the US-Iran relations?

What do these conclusions tell us about the US-Iran relations after the war? The Hamas

operation launched on October 7 became a cause celebre in the context of the sphere of influence. Without a doubt, the event was such a catastrophe for the US and Israel, one of the US's closest allies. Iran is again right in the middle of the events. The Al-Aqsa Storm launched by Hamas fell into the modus operandi of Iranian foreign and security policy. Hamas, albeit not the closest or the strongest one, is one of the Iranian proxies in the region. "Firm evidence tying Iran directly to the assault did not exist," as the Secretary of State Antony Blinken added, "Hamas wouldn't be around in the way that it is without the support that it's received from Iran over the years." But this is how Iran has been operating to preserve a degree of deniability during the crisis, reducing the direct confrontation risk with the US. Iran has been maintaining this policy for the Al-Aqsa Storm, too.

No matter how much they engage in plausible deniability, their past rhetoric and actions proved that their deniability is not credible anymore. The Al-Aqsa Storm is another flashpoint between the US and Iran. However, examining it within the historical patterns that shaped US policy towards Iran, we can conclude that the United States and Iran were not on the brink of war.

First, strategic imperatives related to great-power rivalry explain why Biden could not impose punitive measures on Iran when Washington faces challenges from powerful competitors and intends to reduce its presence in the Middle East. According to the latest threat assessment of the US Intelligence Community¹⁷, the most urgent and critical event that will shape the consequences of strategic competition between the US and its allies, China and Russia, is the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, which can escalate into a broader



conflict between the West and Russia. In that report, China is seen as a near strategic competitor that can alter the global order worldwide. That being said, Iran is labeled as a regional challenger who should be a reference point in any power equation. The challenge from Iran should be dealt with in the context of overarching US policies similar to the Cold War. Accordingly, the US fears losing Iran to the Global South altogether. Any violent action would hurt the United States' global strategic competition more than Iran by permanent alienation of the country.

Second of all, Iran's deterrence through its nuclear program and asymmetric capabilities commanded the Biden administration in the past three years that attacking inside Iran as retaliation to Hamas assault and increasing Iranian proxy attacks on US assets in the region would prove expensive and have counter-productive consequences. For example, the Shiite militia Hezbollah has stockpiled hundreds of thousands of rockets, which gives them the capacity to bombard the entire state of Israel. In this scenario, the danger to Israel seems existential. From a nuclear standpoint, the US military response directly pointed at Iran would force the leader to cross the nuclear threshold. A nuclear Iran would seek the regional hegemony that the US categorically seeks to prevent for decades. Escalating the situation will do the complete opposite for the US interests. For these reasons, it is considered too risky for the US policymakers to escalate the situation.

Lastly, as the US is heading to re-election year, the electoral consideration put pressure on Biden to take a more hawkish attitude on Iran, which is irrefutably behind the 7th assault in one way or another. Biden has to pay attention to the electoral considerations and regulate the policy somewhere between hostility and war. For example, Biden cannot resume the nuclear talks as they were. The Hamas

offensive has added another obstacle to dialogue. While adhering to the terms of the prisoner exchange agreement and resuming the nuclear talks with Iran may have political repercussions for Biden, the potential cost of a confrontation in the region along with a nuclear crisis is probably higher.

Projections on the long-term impact of the Al-Aqsa Storm on US-Iranian relations must be considered within the general framework of the US-Iranian relationship. Under these circumstances, transitioning from a model of *controlled hostility* to another one seems difficult, if not impossible. Any change will only be possible in two ways: an external shock even more profound than the ruptures experienced throughout history or steps of change that persistently continue in the same direction for a very long period.

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“Tanıtım nüshasıdır, para ile satılamaz.”

“Bandrol Uygulamasına İlişkin Usul ve Esaslar Hakkında Yönetmeliğin
5’inci maddesinin 2’nci fıkrası çerçevesinde bandrol taşıması zorunlu değildir.”

About İRAM

Due to its historical depth and material power, Iran is among the countries that have to be reckoned with in the domain of international relations. The deep-rooted historical relations between Iran and Türkiye, border-sharing and comprehensive business relations make it necessary for Türkiye to understand Iran in a multitude of ways. Based on this necessity, the Center for Iranian Studies in Ankara (İran Arařtırmaları Merkezi, İRAM) was established as an independent think tank in Ankara with the purpose of informing the Turkish public and interested parties about Iran. With this in mind, not only does İRAM produce field research, reports, and analyses based on primary resources, it also provides language courses, internships/scholarship programs, support for projects and graduate theses, workshops, and expert seminars in order to meet the need for experts and researchers on Iran in various disciplines in Türkiye. Offering a platform where academicians can share their research on Iran, İRAM also provides digital and printed publications on a wide variety of topics ranging from economy to domestic politics, international policy to security, and Shi'ism to society and culture.



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