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## Trump's Iran Moves: Has Maximum Pressure Maximised Instability In Middle East?



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### Representational Image

The whimsical attitude of the Trump administration toward Iran has significantly affected the political and security situation in the Middle East and the entire world. His presidency has been defined by a “maximum pressure” campaign aimed at crippling Iran economically, militarily and diplomatically. His administration scrapped the 2015 nuclear agreement, imposed crushing sanctions, assassinated Iranian General Qassem Soleimani and boosted ties with Israel and Gulf Arab states. Trump supporters say it curbed Iranian expansionism and reinforced regional relationships. Critics, however, contend that his approach fostered greater instability, undermined diplomacy, and increased the risk of bloodshed in the region.

The question is whether Trump has violated the truce or redrawn Middle Eastern politics with a new balance of power.

### Background

#### US-Iran Relations Before Trump

US-Iranian relations have been shaky since the Iranian Revolution in 1979. The dispute intensified over Iran's nuclear programme and its support for regional proxy groups, including Hezbollah, Hamas, the Houthis and Shiite militias in Iraq and Syria.

The JCPOA, short for Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, was an agreement the Obama administration struck with world powers in 2015. In the accord, Iran would get sanctions relief in exchange for limiting its nuclear activities. The pact was

opposed fervently by Israel, Saudi Arabia and many Republicans in the United States, but backed by European nations and the United Nations.

Trump has dubbed the pact “the worst deal ever negotiated” and argued it is not harsh enough on Iran’s missile development and regional influence.

### **Trump’s Major Actions Against Iran**

#### *The Assassination of Qasem Soleimani (2020)*

In January 2020, in a drone strike near Baghdad airport, the US killed Iranian General Qasem Soleimani, the chief of the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. It was one of the most dramatic escalations in decades of hostility between the United States and Iran.

The Trump administration said the strike was justified because Soleimani was planning attacks against American soldiers and interests. The assassination was seen by supporters as a strong commitment to fight terrorism; a display of American military might and an expose of Iranian hostility.

But the assassination also had major effects on the region. Iran launched missile strikes against US sites in Iraq. Iraqi leaders press for reconsideration of US troop presence. Fears of a full-blown conflict in the Middle East added to the tensions threatening a wider regional conflict.

#### *US withdrawal from JCPOA (2018)*

One of Trump’s most major foreign policy choices was the decision to withdraw from the JCPOA in May 2018. The government argued the pact does not stop Iran’s nuclear goals; it just delays them. This caused economic suffering in Iran, including inflation, unemployment and currency collapse. The pull-out also marked a setback for Middle East diplomacy. Israel and the Gulf states welcomed the tough position on Iran. European allies were opposed to the departure, and tried to rescue the deal. Many analysts argue the breakdown of the JCPOA has fuelled, not halted, Iran’s nuclear activities. To begin with, Iran watered down adherence to nuclear limits.

#### *The “Maximum Pressure” Campaign*

In a “maximum pressure” campaign to destroy Iran’s economy and drive Tehran to negotiate a bigger deal, Trump reimposed severe economic sanctions. Sanctioned entities included: oil exports; banking systems; transport industry; and companies with ties to the Revolutionary Guard

The Trump administration’s sanctions campaign was aimed at isolating Iran from the rest of the world and preventing it from financing proxy organisations across the Middle East.

Supporters of the policy say this campaign cut Iran’s oil revenues deeply and consequently Tehran was not able provide enough money to organisations like Hamas, Hezbollah and the Houthis, it patronised.

### *Solidifying Israel-Gulf Relations*

Trump’s approach on Iran was tied to the improving relations with Israel and the Gulf monarchs. Trump administration acknowledged Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, expressed support for Israel’s security concerns about Iran and helped develop alliances between Israel and few Arab nations. This led to the Abraham Accords, which improved relations between Israel and some Arab countries like UAE and Bahrain.

Deepened US connections with Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Israel aligned with Trump’s broader regional goal of countering Iranian involvement in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen.

Critics argue that the campaign did little to get serious conversation underway, and instead stoked anti-American resentment. Some observers argue the sanctions have hampered moderate political voices inside Iran, and aided hardliners inside the Iranian regime. The economic crisis in Iran also contributed to domestic unrest and political instability which Trump hoped would orchestrate a domestic pressure for regime change.

Advocates of the Abraham Accords argue that the agreements have transformed the geopolitics of the Middle East by creating a regional coalition against Iran. Critics, on the other hand, contend that the accords sidelined the Palestinian issue and deepened divisions among countries in the region.

### **Did Trump Break The Middle East’s Peace?**

Many observers and analysts argue that Trump's Iran policy has destabilised the region in various ways. These include:

#### *Rising Nuclear Tensions*

Iran has gradually increased uranium enrichment levels and reduced cooperation with foreign inspectors since the US withdrew from the nuclear accord. Analysts claim it took Iran closer to becoming a nuclear-armed state.

#### *Risk Of Increasing War*

The death of Ali Khamenei and other top leaders of the regime and military clashes in the Persian Gulf have fuelled worries of a widened confrontation between the US and Iran. There have been more attacks on oil tankers, more missile strikes and more proxy confrontations under the Trump presidency than ever before.

#### *Erosion Of International Diplomacy*

European allies blasted Washington's unilateral exit from the JCPOA. Critics believe Trump eroded trust in international agreements when future administrations may easily walk away from obligations.

### **How Did Trump Transform Politics In The Region?**

Trump supporters think his initiatives have fundamentally changed the balance of power in the Middle East and established a solid platform to countering Iran's regional influence while degrading Iran's hard-core leadership, its nuclear adventures, and overall economy, not discounting the conventional capabilities to use missiles and drones. They claim that sanctions and military pressure have made it harder for Iran to project its power around the region.

#### *Reforming Regional Partnerships:*

To be sure, the Abraham Accords represented a significant breakthrough in Arab-Israeli relations. Several Gulf states prioritised collaboration with Israel on security against Iran setting aside their earlier antagonism.

Initially, Trump's transactional diplomatic behaviour resonated with a number of Middle Eastern regimes that cared more

about security and economic cooperation than ideological politics with analysts arguing that the Abraham Accords forged a new regional order focused on collaboration against Iran. Subsequently, however, doubts began to emerge because of the President's erratic day-to-day postings and unpredictable statements.

### **Long-Term Consequences**

Trump's Iran strategy continues to include military threats and diplomatic pressure. Possible strikes and negotiations continue to reflect the uncertain state of US-Iran relations.

Optimistic readings of such an unpredictable policy suggest the Trump strategy as more of a deterrent, including strengthened regional partnerships, economic pressure on Iran and Arab-Israeli normalisation. Reading negatively, one would find, greater regional instability coupled with Tehran speeding up its nuclear program, (until up to the war in February 2026), diplomatic drop-off and the risk of a wider war.

### **Conclusion**

Donald Trump's Iran policies rewrote Middle East politics. His administration replaced diplomacy with economic pressure, military deterrent and strategic realignment.

Viewed from one perspective these initiatives upset the peace; viewed from another, they transformed regional politics. Critics believe the approaches have destabilised, ramping up tensions and hurting diplomacy. His supporters say that he put an Iranian power on a leash and produced new geopolitical alignments that favour America and its friends.

Trump's Iran policy did not prove to be a viable solution to regional crises, but it did have a lasting effect in transforming the strategic and political climate of the Middle East.

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