

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MEDIA CONTACT:

Stephanie Foggett

+1-646-233-1704

stephanie.foggett@thesoufancenter.org

PRESS RELEASE

AS TENSIONS BETWEEN THE U.S. AND IRAN ESCALATE, A NEW REPORT SHEDS LIGHT ON IRAN'S GRAND STRATEGY

Through implementation of its multi-faceted 'playbook', Iran has been able to pursue its regional strategy to great effect without provoking a major armed conflict with any of its primary adversaries: the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Israel

LINK TO REPORT

(New York, NY- 14 May, 2019) As the United States and Iran appear to be on a collision course, a new report sheds light on Iran's grand strategy and 'playbook'. This critical assessment of Iran's foreign and security policies demonstrates that conflict should not be considered inevitable, and that by analyzing Iran's so-called 'playbook,' containing the Islamic Republic is possible through diplomacy and clever application of U.S. leverage in the region, and presents a favorable alternative to the U.S. when compared with the option of direct military conflict.

The new report *Iran's Playbook - Deconstructing Tehran's Regional Strategy* demonstrates how Iran's regional strategy should not be understood as simply 'supporting terrorism,' - a simplistic perspective that underestimates the degree to which Iran's overall grand strategy is complex and nuanced. Understanding the multi-faceted nature of Iran's approach is crucial to deconstructing how Iran has succeeded, and in fact frustrated counter-efforts by capable powers like the U.S. and Israel. The core of Iran's 'playbook' has been to establish militia groups - mostly, but not exclusively, Shias - first as armed factions and then, through training, funding, and the provision of weapons, into organizations that acquire political legitimacy - even becoming national 'kingmakers.'

Historically, Iran has sought to nurture its allies and proxies to the point where they, and by extension Iran, can usurp state power from within. Iran is then able to harness that power to its strategic advantage, particularly by reorienting regional states toward Iran and away from the U.S. and other Iranian adversaries. More importantly, it has done so without provoking a major armed conflict with the U.S., Israel, Saudi Arabia, or any other powerful actors in the region, doing so cheaply and while suffering modest losses among its own forces.

Escalating Tensions

Since the Trump administration assumed office in January 2017, it has increased pressure on Iran. In May 2018, the U.S. withdrew from the landmark Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), or Iran Nuclear Deal, negotiated under the Obama administration, re-imposing strict economic sanctions on Tehran. In April 2019, the administration designated Iran's elite Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a foreign terrorist organization (FTO). In response, Iran declared the entire U.S. military as a terrorist entity. This month, in response to U.S. claims of possible attacks on American forces in the Middle East, a carrier strike group was deployed to the Persian Gulf. Iran's President Rouhani announced that Iran was taking steps to

curtail its compliance with the nuclear deal, a move guaranteed to ratchet up tensions with Washington, even as the Europeans scramble to mollify all sides involved.

As tensions continue to escalate, next steps by the United States and its allies need to be weighed against Iran's sophisticated, intricate, and nimble grand strategy. Because it perceives its efforts as largely successful, Iran is certain to continue to pursue its regional strategy, unless and until its adversaries are willing or able to blunt Iran's efforts. Rolling back Tehran's regional influence will require an equally nimble approach combining diplomacy, smart counter-terrorism policy, and a nuanced understanding of how and why Iran's soft power efforts have been successful so they may be effectively countered.

Looking forward: containing the Islamic Republic is possible through clever application of U.S. leverage, and also presents a favorable alternative to the U.S. when compared with the option of direct military conflict. Public support for major U.S. interventions in the region has clearly declined over the past decade and the U.S. – regardless of which administration is in office or what is its policy toward Iran – is not likely to further intervene militarily in any regional conflict for the sole reason of rolling back Iran's grand strategy.

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[The Soufan Center](#) is a nonprofit serving as a forum for research, analysis, and strategic dialogue on human security & emergent threats. Please contact **Stephanie Foggett** with any inquiries or interview requests: stephanie.foggett@thesoufancenter.org.

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