

The Enemy Gets a Vote

By Jon B. Alterman

WOMEN'S WORK

Five years ago, Syria recorded the lowest rate of female labor participation in the Middle East. Now, Syrian men are increasingly the ones trapped at home.

With the Syrian government clamping down on men avoiding military service, some men are resorting to extreme measures to avoid conscription. Many who have not fled the country or joined armed groups now hide in their homes to avoid being caught at checkpoints. Others who are in prison refuse the regime's offers to be released for fear of being sent to the front line. As a result, the supply of working-age men has plummeted, and women are filling the vacancies.

A regime official recently stated that the war's radical disruption of the labor market has resulted in women outnumbering men in the workforce by four to one. Women are working as mechanics, minibuses drivers, and restaurant servers – jobs men traditionally fill in Syria.

And although Syria's female workers typically earn less than their male counterparts, women are finding that their new salaries also bring with them unaccustomed financial responsibilities. For example, traditional dowries are fading away, and some women even have to pay for and furnish their marital homes themselves.

Taking on the role of the breadwinner also brings some perks. Women now frequent spaces that were once decidedly the realm of men. Even in conservative parts of Syria, married women are going out to cafés to smoke waterpipes and drink coffee with friends, which would have been unheard of a decade ago. Meanwhile, their husbands care for the children, stuck at home. ■ WT

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ecretary of Defense James Mattis is fond of pointing out, “The enemy gets a vote.” However masterful a maneuver the United States executes, the impact depends on how the adversary responds, and not just on what the United States has done.

Many in the Trump administration see the decision not to comply with the terms of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) as a masterstroke. The president has long been

critical of the terms of the Iran agreement, and Iran's regional behavior and continued ballistic missile development are further proof of its deficiencies. Re-imposing sanctions is intended to send the Iranian economy into a tailspin. The weakened Iranian government will face a stark choice: stop spending money on regional mischief and missile development, and make a new nuclear agreement on U.S. terms, or face disaster. If it all goes according to plan, the Trump administration's determination will “solve” the problem of Iranian behavior for the first time in 40 years because either the Iranian government will act the way the United States wants, or it will crumble.

But the enemy gets a vote. You can be sure the Iranians will actively seek to undermine the U.S. move, and it is not hard to imagine how.

First, Iran will build its alliances. Its largest market is China, which last year imported an average of 600,000 barrels per day from Iran and sees a strategic interest in sourcing oil from countries that are not U.S. allies. China's Belt and Road Initiative targets Iran for investment, and Beijing will act decisively to shield its Iranian investments from U.S. sanctions. China has a broad interest in undermining U.S. global hegemony, and without question, the U.S. sanctions will drive China and Iran closer.

India is Iran's second-biggest market, and Indian refiners had plans to substantially boost Iranian purchases this year. India is also investing billions in the Chabahar Port in southeastern Iran. Iran sees Chabahar as a vital pathway into Central Asia, and India sees it as an important check on Pakistani and Chinese influence in West Asia. India is itself a nuclear weapons state with a long history of rejecting Western domination. While Indian-U.S. ties are growing, in part to counter a rising China, Iran will court India, and despite U.S. appeals, Indian-Iranian ties will also deepen.

(continued on page 2)

NEW REPORT: DESTINATION MAGHREB: CHANGING MIGRATION PATTERNS IN NORTH AFRICA

The CSIS Middle East Program released a new report by Haim Malka, “Destination Maghreb: Changing Migration Patterns in North Africa.” The report illustrates how migration patterns in the North African Maghreb are changing and how governments in the region are responding to these shifts. It addresses the debates migration has sparked in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, and examines the diverse policy choices that governments are making to address the challenge. You can read the report [HERE](#). ■

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

Jon Alterman argued that dismantling the Iran nuclear deal would fit President Trump's desire for making bold and decisive gestures in a CSIS Critical Questions analysis piece, "[May 12 Deadline May Not Settle Iran Sanctions](#)."

Jon Alterman and Heather Conley assessed U.S. strategy in the Eastern Mediterranean in a CSIS Brief, "[Syria, Turkey, and the Eastern Mediterranean](#)."

IN THE MEDIA

"I think the president has a hard task ahead of him, because when the [Iran nuclear] deal was struck, the world was with us." Jon Alterman to [Fox News](#) on President Trump's announcement to abandon the Iran nuclear deal, 5/8/18.

"The president believes in personal chemistry." Jon Alterman in [The Guardian](#) on French President Emmanuel Macron's U.S. visit and building a relationship with President Trump, 4/28/18.

"The challenge with all of this is the president's objection to the deal is visceral, not intellectual." Jon Alterman in [Bloomberg](#) on President Trump's opposition to the Iran nuclear deal, 4/25/18.

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CSIS MIDDLE EAST PROGRAM

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Iran will also reach out strongly to Russia, a fellow energy producer that has been an important Iranian source of military hardware (along with China). Russia (like China and Iran) seems determined to resist U.S. hegemony and arguably seeks to undermine U.S. global leadership more broadly. To many in the Russian government, the United States remains the country's key adversary, and current U.S. sanctions on Russia are a stark reminder of how the United States seeks to punish those who refuse to fall into line. The Kremlin has a keen interest in blocking the United States from effectively sanctioning Iran, and may work with China to devise financial instruments that are impervious to U.S. sanctions.

A primary goal for Iran will be to drive a wedge between the United States and its allies. Iran will try to expand its ties to Turkey, a NATO ally with increasingly strained ties to the West and a historic outlet for Iranians coping with sanctions. Turkey's interests in Syria and Iraq create increasing engagement with Iran, and that increase will continue.

Western Europe pursued a nuclear deal with Iran for more than a decade, not because Europeans were naïve about Iran, but because they thought a negotiation process could blunt Iranian nuclear progress and forestall—and perhaps avoid—war. From a European perspective, that analysis has borne out. Tons of enriched uranium have been shipped out of Iran, inspections have yielded unprecedented visibility into the Iranian nuclear program, and a war such as the one the United States waged in Iraq despite Western European objections has been avoided.

Iran will play the victim with Europe, complaining loudly that it is in full compliance with the agreement. Iranian officials will warn darkly—with justification—that sanctions will embolden Iranian radicals, and they will highlight the profits Europe can make from a growing Iranian economy. Most European business with Iran is likely to dry up, as almost all large firms are deeply embedded in an international financial system tied to the United States. Yet, European governments will work hard to preserve the deal, pulling away from the United States and seeking work-arounds to facilitate continued engagement with Iran.

Amid diplomacy toward potential allies and proclamations of innocence to Western Europe, the Iranians should be expected to do what they do well. They will ramp up assistance to armed groups while denying their involvement, boost their cyber efforts, and dance again with uranium enrichment. Attribution for any specific incident may be difficult, but the general trend will be clear. The goals will be to remind the world of the Iranians' ability to make trouble, and to deny the Trump administration credit for bringing stability to the Middle East. Iran's strategic objective will be to split the United States from allies and partners, and to bust apart the unprecedented consensus that united China, Russia, Europe, and the United States to put pressure on Iran.

The Trump administration is likely to win short-term victories. European business with Iran will stall, investments will be withdrawn, and the Iranian economy will sag. In the longer term, the United States will find itself more isolated from its European partners, China and Russia will be more protective of Iran, and both countries are likely to push ahead developing financial instruments beyond the reach of U.S. regulators. Europeans, already exhausted by efforts to partner with the administration, are likely to see benefit in shifting away from overwhelming reliance on the United States and the dollar.

President Trump told the UN General Assembly last September, "As President of the United States, I will always put America first, just like you...will always, and should always, put your countries first." U.S. adversaries and allies will vote, and many will be voting against the United States. ■ 5/16/2018