



Why Trump's decision on Iran's Revolutionary
Guards Corps is dangerous.

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Photo de couverture : Poster de propagande de l'IRGC,
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1. Introduction

The decision as expected, has been made. On April 8, the Trump administration decided, in an unprecedented move, to add Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) to its list of terrorist organizations (Trump, 2019; Pompano, 2019; U.S. Secretary of State, 2019). Of course, many of the IRGC's actions are reprehensible but, if the purpose of such a move is to weaken the Iranian regime, the consequences could be the opposite to those desired. Moreover, Trump's decision increases tensions between Tehran and Washington (as well as with Israel and Saudi Arabia) and puts them on a still hostile path that at same time, adds some fuel to the Middle Eastern fire. So, far from being productive, this decision will be destabilizing and dangerous. Here is why.

2. The Iranian State as main target: a symbolic perspective

The Trump administration's official position on Iran has always been to reject the idea of regime change, arguing that the main goals of the United States were to contain Iranian influence in the Middle East and to move the Tehran regime's foreign policy to a less aggressive stance by forcing it to stop its support for terrorist groups such as the Lebanese Hezbollah and the Palestinian Hamas and by pushing it to abandon its ballistic missile program (Watkins, 2018). In fact, this last point is linked to Trump's decision on the IRGC insofar as IRGC is guiding the country ballistic ambitions. In reality, some doubts exist about this official policy line. Indeed, the Trump administration's actions to date – withdrawal from the JCPOA, reestablishment of old sanctions and establishment of new ones as well as the latest decision on the IRGC – look more like a regime change strategy. Additionally, John Bolton (National Security Advisor), Mike Pompeo (Secretary of State) and Rudy Giuliani (one of Trump's unofficial advisors) have in the past stated that they were in favor of a regime change in Iran (Bolton, 2017; Mackey, 2018). Before his nomination as National Security Advisor, Bolton wrote several articles detailing his strategy for promoting regime change in Tehran and participated in meetings organized by People's Mojahedin Organization (MEK), an Iranian political group fighting the Islamic Republic. Giuliani although he holds no official position within the Trump administration is still regularly invited to such MEK meetings and uses such occasions to push for regime change in Iran, arguing that US sanctions will result in such an outcome (Reuters, 2018).

Up to now, the published official posture of the United States regarding Iran was to designate it as one of the main state sponsors of terrorism. With his decision, Trump goes a step further by declaring Iran a terrorist state, which seems to be a new concept considering the fact that terrorists are normally non-state actors. Indeed the IRGC is a state actor as it is a branch – the ideological one – of the Iranian armed forces, which comprise the Sepah-e Pasdaran (IRGC) and the Artesh (the regular army). Both branches possess their own general staff as well as a certain level of independence but at the end they are unified under the

ultimate command of the national general staff, which is dominated by IRGC commanders. So, if we take a look at the Iranian armed forces as a whole, it appears that there is a clear domination by IRGC on the Artesh even if the latter possesses more troops. On the other hand, the IRGC has the best military materiel and is considered as the elite branch of the Iranian armed forces. In fact, the IRGC is more than a military actor within the Iranian State. It has been institutionalized and occupies key positions in national economy and political decision-making processes (Katzman, 1993; RAND, 2009; Takey, 2009; Ostovar, 2016).

Furthermore, the Artesh and IRGC's missions are different. Artesh's core mission is to defend the country against external threats such as is the case for regular armed forces across the world. IRGC's mission is double and embraces a broader scope of prerogatives. IRGC is not only charged with defending the national territory just as the regular army but also to defend the Islamic regime against any internal threats. They share this last mission with the Basij, the ideological paramilitary militia of the regime (Golkar, 2015). So the IRGC is more than a military force defending the country, it is the regime guardian as is clearly stated in its name. They are literally the guardians of the Islamic Republic. Therefore, they can intervene to crack down on riots against the regime if necessary. They threatened former President Khatami during the 1999 student's riot to take actions if calm was not re-established quickly and they played a role in the crackdown following Ahmadinejad's 2009 re-election. On the other hand, Artesh has always stayed away from such actions (Kaussler, 2011; Saha, 2014). In the foreign policy field, the IRGC is also an key player in the decision-making process, as well as an instrument of action via its al-Quds Force - a special elite unit in charge of overseas operations and which plays an important role in Syrian war but also in Iraq, Yemen and Afghanistan (Uskowi, 2018).

Iranian Foreign Policy decision-making process passes essentially – under the monitoring of the Supreme Leader – through the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), a political organ gathering different elements – elected and designated – of the regime. Within the SNSC, IRGC commanders have significant influence in the shaping of Tehran's foreign policy.

So the IRGC is at the center of the power framework in Iran and is also one of the main instruments of the regime, especially for its more conservative elements, which have always favored a confrontational approach to the West, as opposed to more moderate figures like the current President Rohani and Minister of Foreign Affairs Javad Zarif who represent the pragmatic and so-called moderate faction of the Iranian regime.

3. The Iranian State as main target: an economic perspective

IRGC is not only a state and military actor at the service of the regime. In fact, it is not even completely subordinate to the political power – especially the executive power in the hands of the elected president – to the extent that it enjoys a large level of autonomy reporting mainly to the Iranian Supreme Leader, who is appointed for life and is currently Ali Khamenei (since 1989 and the death of R. Khomeini).

Among its other activities, the IRGC is also an essential economic actor. Even if it is difficult to accurately estimate its importance, most studies on the topic estimate that the IRGC's economic activities represent between 50 and 66 percent of the national economic productivity capacity. How is this possible? After the Iran-Iraq War, President Rafsanjani tried to promote an economic policy in favor of privatization with the idea to strengthen the private sector. He was limited in this by some hardliners, who opposed his views and limited the scope of his policy by imposing restrictions on it. It was then decided that war veterans should be the first beneficiaries of privatizations (Axworthy, 2013, p. 321). Through its foundations (Bonyads), the IRGC became then an economic actor whose power has increased ever since.

This development has been counterproductive and harmful for the Iranian economy. Far from supporting the private sector, it made it weaker. For years, IRGC benefitted from international and US sanctions, which primarily impact small economic actors causing them to disappear. In consequence, the IRGC enjoyed this development by building monopolistic or almost monopolistic positions within the Iranian economic landscape (RAND, 2009). The consequences are a high level of corruption, nepotism, cronyism, and economic mismanagement. Today the IRGC remains, via its foundations, the country's main employer and Trump's last move will complicate business activities with Iran yet further and will mainly impact normal Iranians. The Iranian economy is thus also at stake here but the IRGC's elites will not be impacted, rather the opposite.

Indeed, it must be noticed that Iranian moderates, especially President Rohani, are aware of the negative impact of IRGC's grip on economic activities and have tried since 2013 to reduce their impact. Rohani did not really succeed in weakening the IRGC's economic control but he did prevent it becoming even more important. In light of the international context, it was, indeed, almost impossible for Rohani to struggle too openly with IRGC given that it plays a so essential role in Iranian foreign policy in Syria and Iraq. Trump's decision now makes the IRGC a victim of what the Iranian regime calls the "Western injustice" or "Western interference". In consequence, IRGC's position in Iran is now stronger than ever and all the elements of the regime – moderates and hardliners – have now the national duty to stand by it. Those who would try to criticize the IRGC within Iran will now face accusations of collusion with the enemy. In other words, Trump just put IRGC under an indestructible umbrella on the Iranian domestic political stage.

4. The Iranian State as main target: an Iranian political perspective

By making the IRGC untouchable in Iran, Donald Trump also strengthens hardliners and weakens moderates, the last being – however unpleasant that could be – the best hope for a less aggressive Iran. Observers must keep in mind that there is actually no credible and sustainable political alternative to the Islamic Republic, no matter how difficult it may be to admit. Many opposition groups exist abroad but they enjoy almost no support within Iranians living in Iran. The most famous is the MEK, mentioned above, which enjoys privileged access to U.S. conservative politicians but also to some European leaders. In fact, the MEK is very unpopular in Iran due to its support for Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq war - support that is still considered in Iran as an act of treason. The last Shah's son, Reza Pahlavi, also has his own network and some media visibility abroad but his political weight is near to zero among Iranians living in the country. So, if there is no solution abroad, what about in Iran itself? Due to the nature of the regime, there is, of course, no official or large-scale organized opposition within the country. However, many Iranians consider that the best hope for an improved political situation must be found in the regime itself or, to be more specific, in its moderate elements. Iran is a relative stable country and even if the situation is far from being perfect and many Iranians have grievances against the regime, a majority of the population doesn't want a new revolution but still hopes for an evolution. Why? Because even if the economy is crumbling due to U.S. sanctions and local misgovernment, people saw what happened in Syria and are afraid of such a scenario in Iran. They don't want a revolution that could lead to a civil war and that would see foreign interferences occur, probably from the U.S., Saudi Arabia and Israel, the two last having an interest in keeping Iran in a chaotic situation.

Moderates in Iran campaign for a new foreign policy towards the West and the U.S. through the promotion of a normalized and pacified relationship and by rejecting the dogmatic logic of automatic confrontation with Washington. However, they do not promote that through idealism. They do so because they believe it has the best chance of keeping the regime alive over the long-term. They consider the confrontation to be counterproductive for the economy and they believe that the regime's legitimacy must be based on economic achievements which benefit the whole population. They want, in other words, to buy social peace to keep the regime in place and, to do so, the regime itself must evolve to some extent. From their perspective, the classic revolutionary and ideological rhetoric is overrated due to its lack of support among young Iranians, who were not born during the Revolution and who represent today over fifty percent of the population.

On the other hand, hardliners don't want to abandon old ideas. They fear two things. First, that it could cause them to lose their benefits on the national political stage as well as on the economic landscape. Secondly, they fear that such a development would cause the regime to collapse rather than strengthen it. From their perspective, the state identity of the Islamic Republic and thus its legitimacy are based on its rhetoric and ideology which blames

the West. To abandon this posture would open a Pandora's box leading to an uncontrolled situation with a risk of revolution.

So the least worst-case scenario – far from being perfect – for Iran and Iranians, remains the moderates, who already have to deal with hardliner opposition at home, including IRGC. Trump's decision just reinforces the Iranian hawks by ruling in their favor in the light of their own assertions. That was already the case with Trump's withdrawal from the JCPOA. Iranian hardliners – including some IRGC officials – made statements before the signature of the deal that such an agreement would never work because – they said – the U.S. are and will always be untrustworthy. Trump proved them right. With his decision on the IRGC, he did so again, reinforcing the feeling already shared by many Iranians that the U.S. will remain an enemy for some time and thus that a confrontational posture remains the most appropriate strategy. On the other hand, Trump destroyed the moderates' political project. He ostracized them and caused them to lose their legitimacy at home. No one would be surprised if, during the next Iranian legislative and presidential elections, hardliners take control of all the levers of the power in Iran. In fact, it would not be surprising if the next Iranian president is a former IRGC official or commander. If Iranian hardliners don't succeed in such a move they will more than likely try it.

Also, Trump seems to underestimate nationalistic feelings among Iranians. He appears to think that he is targeting only the regime – which is neither completely false nor completely true – but there is no doubt that for many Iranians living in Iran, his decision will be perceived as another aggression against Iran itself, which includes its people. U.S. conservative officials seem to believe in a false dichotomy when they are considering Iran, imagining that, if Iranians are dissatisfied with their political authorities, they are automatically in favor of Washington. Americans could not be more wrong. The IRGC may be criticized by Iranians themselves on many topics, including its role in the national economy. But at the same time, Iranians may also praise the IRGC's role in the defense of Iranian security, for example, through its war against ISIS in Iraq and Syria. Iranians don't have the feeling that their government is looking for war or more tensions with the West – notably because Tehran is still engaged in the JCPOA. So they do not perceive the current U.S. policy as a strategy targeting the regime but more as a global strategy of aggression against Iran as a whole. In particular, they don't understand why Washington shares such a friendly relationship with Saudi Arabia, which is perceived by Iranians as the main sponsor of radical Islam and which had financially sponsored ISIS until Summer 2014. Additionally, it is not uncommon, when talking with people in Iran, to hear that Tehran – via the IRGC – has defeated ISIS in Iraq and Syria. This view is of course simple and reductive but it is a commonly-held perception in the country.

In the end, all these elements have shaped a strong feeling of injustice, which is shared by many Iranians. Also aware of their history with the West, they still remember many episodes of Western interference inside their country. Anti-Western feelings did not appear

out of nowhere during the 1979 revolution. Rather, they are rooted in objective and historical motives that date back to the older Great Game period. Trump's policy has, for now, strengthened those feelings as well as opening a golden path for Iranian hardliners. From their perspective, Trump is certainly a threat but he is also a useful idiot. In this regard, the words of Ali Khamenei during his speech in front of Iranian Navy officers on the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution in February 2017 are forceful. Indeed, he did then officially thank Donald Trump for revealing the true face of the United States (Erdrink, 2017). When your enemies thank you, it is rarely a good sign.

5. The Iranian State as main target: a legal and paradigmatic perspective.

To label the IRGC as a terrorist group raises other questions of a more legal and paradigmatic nature. Terrorism is a broad issue, subject to many studies and which can be understood through different approaches (Laurens & Delmas-Marty, 2010). A political scientist, a military analyst, an international law specialist, or a politician can have different definitions of terrorism. Those definitions might be rooted in objective facts or in more subjective feelings and interpretations.

However, it must be remembered that terrorism is not an ideology in itself but a way of taking action. There are many different ideologies among terrorist groups and Islamist terrorists are only the most well known in Western countries due to recent history and current affairs. But terrorists might be anarchists, far-right or far-left activists, white supremacists, etc. Acts matter, political and ideological motives don't, at least in theory. Also, terrorists are generally non-state actors but may be sponsored by states. In other words, they don't belong to a public force enjoying state-legitimized use of force in the limits of the law. This simple understanding constitutes a first element for defining terrorist actions and by extension terrorist actors. There is also another singular form of terrorism that useful in our approach towards Trump's decision about the IRGC: State terrorism. However, we will not attempt here to give an exact definition of terrorism and terrorist. It is not our purpose and there is actually no worldwide shared definition accepted by all states. Furthermore, there is also an important body of literature about this issue for those who are interested. Here we'll just consider some questions and challenges related to this issue.

A major challenge arises when we talk about non-state actors defined by some states as terrorist groups: perception issue. For some, they are terrorists, for others, they may be perceived as freedom fighters. Consider the Kurdish PKK as an example. For Turkey, the European Union and the United States, the PKK is labeled as a terrorist organization. For many Kurdish activists, they are freedom fighters. The same problem of perception can arise with Palestinian groups such as Hamas and, before it, with FPO. The same can be said of the IRA in Ireland and ETA on Basque territory. The Lebanese Hezbollah is a very particular case.

Israel and Washington consider it as terrorist group but it remains also a political actor with members elected in Lebanon through a democratic process.

Those examples bring up the question of the possibility for a state to change its posture towards such groups. In other words, once a state has classified a group as terrorist, can it later reconsider its view? This is sometimes necessary in order to reach a peace agreement and to end a conflict or, at least, to simply start a negotiation process. The IRA and the FPO are to some extent good examples. Trump's decision against the IRGC goes in the opposite direction rejecting any chance of peace.

Moreover, we can see that, generally, states don't want to recognize non-state fighters because this would give them some legitimacy. Also, to some extent, to recognize such groups as military non-state actors might trigger the application of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and thus give them better legal protection in the event of armed conflict. For many states, presenting an armed opposition as terrorist doesn't trigger the application of IHL and thus fighters affiliated to such groups remain – in this political perspective – under the application of national penal law, which provides them a lower level of protection. This is a political calculation: states involved in such conflicts generally want the freedom to put down armed opposition and they want to do so without regard for IHL. As an example, if a state soldier is killed by a non-state fighter and IHL is triggered, then the latter cannot be prosecuted once the armed conflict has ended. But if IHL is not triggered, then he can be prosecuted for murder. So the difference is huge and political factors play an important role here. However, we must emphasize that, theoretically, and in line with legal precedents set by international courts and tribunals – especially by ICTY¹ – motives and ideologies are not relevant criteria in IHL precisely because of their subjective dimension. According to international legal institutions standards, the determination of the existence of an armed conflict is based solely on two criteria: the intensity of the conflict and the degree of organization of the parties. However, international reality is that some states, especially the more powerful, still enjoy a large freedom of action and can to some extent violate – or interpret as they like – International Law without risking any international legal consequence. As a permanent member of the UNSC², the United States will never authorize the creation of an international tribunal mandated to judge American soldiers. Also, Washington has never recognized the International Criminal Court (ICC) and President Trump has never hidden his lack of consideration for international law and international institutions – except if those last ones can without doubt serve U.S. interests as defined by himself.

When political considerations are taken into account, it becomes more complicated to classify a group as terrorist or not. If the Kurdish PKK is considered as a terrorist organization by the European Union, it is not labeled as such by the Belgian State. Also the YPG, the

¹ International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

² United Nations Security Council.

armed branch of the Syrian PKK (PYD), which is structurally linked to the PKK in Turkey, remains the main U.S. ally in Syrian civil war. It received material and financial assistance from Washington and is still – for now – supported by American Special Forces on the ground. All those elements show how difficult it is to deal with a typology issue when political interests are at stake.

In the case of the IRGC, even if we consider a large definition of what a terrorist actor is, it appears difficult – from an academic perspective – to affirm that it is clearly a terrorist group. First, because it remains a State actor and is thus a component of the Iranian State. Secondly, even though it supports and sponsors the Lebanese Hezbollah and the Palestinian Hamas who are understandably considered by Israel and the United States as terrorist organizations, the reality appears not that simple in light of the perception issue discussed above. From an Iranian perspective, Hamas and Hezbollah remain legitimate actors. Many Muslims across the world share this perception about Hamas and Hezbollah even if they are not a majority and that support for Islamic groups seems to decrease year after year (Pew Research Center, 2010 & 2014; Gidda, 2014; Pollock, 2014).

Also, even if we agree that Hezbollah and Hamas are clearly terrorist groups, an indirect involvement through sponsorship is quite different than committing a terrorist attack directly. From a legal perspective, those are two different charges and to some extent the sponsor cannot be considered as a terrorist itself. If IRGC has directly committed unjustified actions – in light of the IHL principle of military necessity – that wounded or killed civilians during a conflict – for example in Syria – then it would be more relevant to prosecute accountable individuals affiliated to IRGC before an international jurisdiction with the authority to examine IHL violations.

Another issue linked to political considerations arises with Trump's decision: the existence of a double-standard treatment regarding the IRGC in light of U.S. interests. Indeed, from a geopolitical point of view, it is easily understandable that the United States and Israel blame IRGC for many of its actions and look to contain its capacities. However, from a legal point of view, why does Washington consider the IRGC as a terrorist group and not apply the same standards to the Pakistani ISI or Saudi Arabian Secret Service? The Pakistani ISI is involved in Afghanistan through its support to some Taliban, and Saudi services have contributed to spread radical Islam across the world. Also, Riyadh had sponsored ISIS until Summer 2014. Regarding the accusation of state terrorism towards the IRGC, which the Trump administration blames for the murder of Iranian opponents abroad, notably in Europe, the same kind of accusation can be expressed towards the Saudi Arabian Secret Service with Jamal Khashoggi's murder in Turkey. Also, relating to accusations targeting the IRGC, it is more likely – in light of the operational mode – that the responsibility for those attacks is situated at the level of the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence. However, many questions remain unanswered about those operations and no conclusion can be reached for now in light of the public elements at our disposal.

In the end, Trump's decision on the IRGC appears more as a political act, targeting the Iranian state than a decision based on an objective and legal approach to the problem. It remains to be determined what the consequences in the field will be in the event of confrontation between U.S. and IRGC forces.

First, could Trump's decision impact the rules of engagement between U.S. and IRGC forces? For years, throughout its war against terrorism, Washington has acted towards terrorists without much consideration for IHL and International Human Rights Law (IHRL) and has used extensive rules of engagement. This has been the case with drone attacks in Pakistan under the Obama administration (Zenko, 2013). Those attacks continue under Trump's presidency. In fact, they are now even less transparent as, on 6th March 2019, President Trump signed an executive order that revoked the requirement, formulated under the Obama administration, that U.S. intelligence officials must publicly report the number of civilians killed in CIA drone strikes outside declared war zones (Brunstetter, 2019). Some may argue it may be justified due to the special nature of terrorist fighters. Nonetheless, it remains a subjective view. Tensions between U.S. Navy and IRGC naval forces remain frequent in the waters of the Persian Gulf. In January 2016, IRGC captured several U.S. sailors and IRGC speedboats regularly harass U.S. Navy ships, which sail on purpose alongside disputed waters claimed by Iran. For now, it remains a psychological struggle but the question deserves to be asked: will Trump's decision change the rules of engagement for U.S. Navy ships involved in such incidents? Another problem could arise: in reaction to Trump's decision, IRGC forces could act more aggressively. For now, those remain questions and hypotheses but the risk is real and is a consequence of the current U.S. policy.

Secondly, could Trump's decision change the treatment by U.S. forces of hypothetical prisoners affiliated to the IRGC? Normally, according to International Law, if the capture occurs during an armed conflict, IHL is triggered and prisoners must be treated according to the fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. If the capture doesn't occur during an armed conflict, for example, following an error or an isolated incident, then the prisoners must be treated according to IHRL. However, we already discussed Washington's lack of consideration for those two branches of International Law in light of its war against terrorism. So, given that IRGC members are now considered as terrorists, it is possible that Washington chose to treat hypothetical prisoners affiliated to the IRGC according to its own national standards regarding terrorists; standards that remain far below those of IHL and IHRL.

6. The Iranian State as main target: a regional security perspective.

Trump's last move against the IRGC and Iran will certainly lead to retaliations. The nature and the scope of the Iranian answer may take various forms but some points deserve to be highlighted and can be made with reasonable confidence. Trump's decision will probably

strengthen the grip of IRGC on Iranian Middle Eastern Foreign Policy, which will not be without consequences, mainly in Syria and Iraq but also, to some extent, in Yemen, Afghanistan, and Lebanon. Finally, it could also impact the frequency of ballistic tests conducted by IRGC.

In Syria, IRGC's al-Quds force and its proxies will certainly adopt a more aggressive posture and behavior towards U.S. and Israeli interests. For example, they could try to strengthen their short and middle-range ballistic capabilities in the country, in order to increase the pressure against Israel and Washington. Additionally, the future of the Kurdish issue in Syria remains uncertain. There is a high probability that Iran will try to weaken the Kurdish position in Syria if it cannot reach an agreement with Kurdish leaders. In the worst-case scenario, this could open a new front in the country and Turkey might be tempted to participate in it. To some extent, the possibility of an agreement between Iran and Kurdish forces is linked to American policy regarding its support for the YPG. For now this policy remains unclear. In December last, Donald Trump announced a complete withdrawal of the 2000 U.S. troops present in Syria but he recently partially changed his mind, announcing that finally, the U.S. will maintain 200 troops on the ground (Noack, 2019). Whatever, in light of Iranian interests in Syria, Tehran wants to maintain a central authority as strong as possible in the hands of Bashar al-Assad, which means very limited autonomy for Kurdish territories and if perhaps no autonomy at all. Also, the future of Moscow's attitude regarding these issues and possibilities remains a parameter which is difficult to predict. However, the risk of harassment towards U.S. military presence in the country by Iranian troops and/or proxies is now higher than ever.

In Iraq, it must be remembered that Iran and IRGC played an important role against ISIS during Summer 2014. When the Iraqi army collapsed, Iranian forces and proxies stopped ISIS forces 120 kilometers from Baghdad. According to some reports, during Obama's presidency, Iranian and U.S. forces even unofficially coordinated their efforts to defeat ISIS (Beauchamp, 2015; Cooper, 2015). The scope of this coordination remains unknown as Iranian and U.S. official statements on the topic were occasionally contradictory (Esfandiary & Tabatabai, 2015). However, in light of the reality on the ground, it appears almost impossible to imagine that no form of coordination occurred between the two parties. Today, the IRGC is well rooted in Iraq through its different proxies, which now claim political responsibilities as a reward for their struggle against ISIS. Iraqi leaders are now in an uncomfortable position and must manage their decisions in a balanced way between American and Iranian interests. In February 2019, Trump's statement, according to which he was in favor of maintaining U.S. troops in Iraq to "watch Iran", has already increased tensions and was barely criticized by Iraqi officials (Detsch, 2019; Rubin & Schmitt, 2019). Trump's decision against the IRGC could increase the aggressiveness of Iranian proxies in Iraq against the 5 000 U.S. troops which are still in the country. American citizens working in Iraq could be kidnapped as hostages by Tehran's proxies and held ransom. This could lead to further instability and uncertainty regarding Iraq's future.

In Afghanistan, Tehran could use the same strategy than in Iraq by pulling its lever of influence to target U.S. interests, troops, and citizens, and to put some pressure on the Kabul government. In Yemen, Iran will certainly not decrease its support to Houthi rebels for now. Even in Lebanon, American citizens are now in a more dangerous position.

Finally, IRGC remains at the head of the Iranian ballistic program. In retaliation against Trump's decision, they could make the choice to increase the number and frequency of their ballistic tests. This could lead to tensions with President Rohani, which one looks to avoid provocations on this topic with European countries in order to maintain the JCPOA – already greatly weakened – alive.

7. Conclusion

Even without any sympathy towards the IRGC, it must be recognized that Trump's move against the Iranian elite military force involves a lot of danger and uncertainty at the Iranian domestic as well as at the regional level. The risk of incidents is real and the Middle East is today more dangerous than yesterday, especially for U.S. military troops and citizens in the region. Following Trump's decision, Iranian leaders have decided, in a symbolic move, to add U.S. troops in the region to their own list of terrorist organizations (Hafezi, 2019). The most dramatic effect of Trump's decision remains that today, it is clearly impossible for the U.S. to pursue diplomacy with Iran and to find peaceful solutions to the many Middle Eastern political problems. These problem cannot be solved without an Iranian participation due to the fact that Iran is – whether you like it or not – a key player in the region. Today, the risk of a clash is higher than ever and even a small incident could be used as a pretext by Washington to start a broader armed confrontation with Iran. Many factors remain unknown and uncertain but the capacity of Iranian and U.S. leaders and military commanders to keep a cool head will play a great role in the evolution of the current situation.

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L'analyse des éléments déclencheurs des conflits et des instruments de leur gestion - sanctions et incitants économiques comme moyens de politique étrangère; crises et interventions humanitaires; rôle de la mémoire dans un processus de réconciliation, par exemple - est combinée à l'étude empirique de différends internationaux et de processus de paix spécifiques.