



A troubled partnership: The US and Europe in the Middle East

by Luigi Scazzieri

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Europe should resist reinstating economic sanctions on Iran if Tehran's violations of the international nuclear agreement remain limited. Taking the same hard line as US President Donald Trump would risk pushing Iran to further expand its nuclear activities. This is one of the key conclusions of a new Centre for European Reform research paper entitled '[A troubled partnership: The US and Europe in the Middle East](#)' which takes an in-depth look at the different approaches the US and EU have to Middle East security, including Iran, and its implications for the Transatlantic relationship.

The US and Europe have often pursued different agendas in the Middle East, but since Trump became president their approaches have become increasingly hard to reconcile. Nowhere is this more evident than in their approaches towards Iran. The US withdrawal from the Iran nuclear agreement has led to an increase in tensions and raised the risk of a military confrontation. The EU's priority should be to try to de-escalate the situation while preserving as much of the architecture of the nuclear deal as possible.

Elsewhere in the region, Trump's staunch support for Israel and relocation of the US embassy to Jerusalem has contributed to the transatlantic rift, while his withdrawal of US troops from Syria and support for strongman Khalifa Haftar in Libya have also created fresh challenges for Europe. Europeans should steer US policy away from escalation and try to co-operate more closely in areas of common interest across the Middle East. But ultimately, Europe will need to shake off its passivity if it wants to secure its interests in the region.

"As long as Iranian violations of the nuclear deal remain small, Europeans should avoid re-imposing sanctions, as this risks pushing Iran towards further expanding its nuclear programme. Instead, they should take steps to ensure Iran can sell some oil, while also ensuring Iran understands that enlarging its nuclear programme much further would result in a re-imposition of sanctions. Iran is the most glaring example of how Trump's approach to the Middle East has created fresh challenges for European countries. Ultimately, if Europe wants to secure its interests in the region, it must not be afraid to forge its own path," said Luigi Scazzieri, research fellow at the CER and author of the paper.

Note for editors: For further information on the report and to request an interview with Luigi Scazzieri, please contact Nick Winning in the CER press office on pressoffice@cer.eu or + 44 (0) 20 7233 1199. Follow us on Twitter [@CER_EU](https://twitter.com/CER_EU) and the author on [@LScazzieri](https://twitter.com/LScazzieri).