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COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

EVOLUTION OF U.S FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS THE GULF DURING TRUMP'S

PRESIDENCY (2016 - 2020): IMPLICATIONS FOR THE IRAN-GCC RELATIONS

BY

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ABSTRACT

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Title: Evolution of US Foreign Policy towards the Gulf During Trump's Presidency (2016 - 2020): Implications for the Iran-GCC Relations

Supervisor of Thesis: Nikolay A. Kozhanov.

The U.S and Arab Gulf States' relations had been strong since the 1979 Islamic revolution, and this had a negative impact on the GCC Iranian relations. However, by the mid-2010s, the GCC - U.S. relations witnessed a serious rift due to the Arab Monarchies of the Gulf not supporting the nuclear deal during the Obama presidency (2009-2017) (Roberts, 2015). Subsequently, the GCC States hoped that President Trump (2016- 2020) coming to office in 2016 would be stricter with Iran and limit its power in the region. Nevertheless, the Trump administration's decisions such as pulling out of the Nuclear Deal (JCPOA) (CBC, 2020), demanding that Saudi Arabia pays the U.S for protecting it (Boubouche, 2017), tweeting against Qatar in the beginning of the blockade (Karl, 2017), and the assassination of the Iranian major general Qasem Soleimani in January of 2020 (Gathman, 2020) have increased tension in the Gulf region. This thesis argues that the Arab Gulf States were pushed to be more active in mediation and to increase cooperation with Iran in an attempt to bring stability. The aim of this thesis is to analyze the changes in the GCC -Iran relations during the Trump era to understand the potential trajectories of their development in the future.

DEDICATION

*I would like to dedicate this thesis to my family, friends, professors, and colleagues
for all their support that helped me bring this work to light.*

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INTRODUCTION

The United States became the dominant superpower in the Gulf region following the withdrawal of Great Britain in the 1970s. However, the United States first began showing interest in the Gulf in the late 1930's when they found large amounts of oil in Saudi Arabia (Council on Foreign Relations, n.d). Standard Oil of California (SoCal) was awarded an oil concession in 1933 (Morton, 2018). The breakout of the Iran-Iraq War in 1980 in Gulf precipitated the U.S.'s believe that it was necessary to step in and protect its interests.

For most of contemporary history there has been competitiveness between the two parts of the Gulf, the Arab States of the Gulf and Iran, and it has gone through many phases. Saudi Arabia and Iran were both allies to the United States during the Shah's reign (1925- 1975), yet, at the same time, they were both suspicious of each other's intentions (Arfa, n. d). However, to Saudi Arabia's dislike Iran attained a higher status within the U.S. at the time (Nader, 2013). In 1979 the Iranian revolution caused a shift and introduced a new aspect to the historic Iranian-Arab rivalry. Later the 1980 Iran-Iraq war, further brought the U.S military into the picture: Kuwait requested U.S maritime protection and the U.S responded with the Earnest Will act in 1987, coming as a result of a conflict known as the first tanker war (The anti-shipping campaigns, 2008).

The United States was not very welcome among the conservative Arab and Muslim communities in the Gulf, but this slowly changed the during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait (1990-1991) (Mobley, 2003). The Saudi government was able to convince its people that the U.S. presence was necessary for protection. The Iraqi government threatened Kuwait in 1994, when Iraq moved around 50,000 troops near

the Kuwaiti border (Gordon, 1994). This caused the United States to send more of their forces into the Gulf (Mobley, 2003). The GCC states have always followed a policy of pragmatic omni-balancing, especially when dealing with giant neighbors in order to obtain peace in the region (Nonneman, 2004). Therefore, it is normal for them to strive to keep good relations with the U.S which was the strongest power in the region. The GCC States choose to ally with the U.S to increase their power which is known as the Bandwagoning strategy.¹ This created a new balance of power in the Gulf which was the U.S- GCC alliance against Iran, and a phase in the Iran-US-GCC triangle.

Both the U.S and Gulf States benefited from the U.S presence in the region. Among the U.S' interests in the Gulf was its hopes that Saudi Arabia would help back its position in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the Arab- Israeli peace process (Gause, 2010). However, Saudi Arabia, being a religious authoritarian state, found it difficult to support pro-Western ideas without having to deal with domestic back-lash in return. The Gulf States have been consistently relying on the U.S for protection and assistance, which has in return helped the U.S gain more influence and strength in achieving its goals in the region (Scott, 2016). Even with the United States' military presence in Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi, and the UAE, some argue that it is limited due to the public being highly ambivalent to that U.S military's presence (Donovan, 2003). Donovan (2003) argues that Bahrain, Kuwait, and the U.A.E specifically, share their concerns regarding potential regional threats. As a result, this

¹ Bandwagoning is when a small state chooses to maximize its influence, by adopting an alignment strategy, where the small state allies with a larger and more powerful state (Rickli, 2016).

has led these countries to provide the U.S with constant access for military activities over several decades. Presently, the GCC States considers Iran to be their main threat.

As for the other side of the Gulf, Iran was under sanctions from 1987 until 2015 when the U.S President Barak Obama announced that an agreement had been reached with Iran known as the JCPOA (Davenport, 2022)². President Obama gave a speech in which he explained the importance of reaching an agreement with Iran that would benefit all parties and avoid conflict in the Middle East. He argued that the international society did not agree with leaving Iran under sanctions and that keeping it sanctioned only pushed it to obtain nuclear weapons that could possibly lead to WW3. He stated: “But simply no deal means a greater chance of world war in the Middle East” (Obama, 2015). The argument presented for Obama’s motives behind the nuclear deal were agreeable and he gained the support of a good number of supporters. Yet, it is worth considering that, others have argued that the rivalry between Iran and the GCC States, especially Saudi Arabia, is shaped by the U.S’ policies towards the Gulf States. Thus, at the time many believed that JCPOA had a positive impact on the Gulf (Mabon, 2018). The reason for this is that the nuclear deal caused a great deal of concern in Saudi Arabia and triggered a more effective foreign policy (Mabon, 2018).

² The nuclear deal states that the International inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) the permission to continuously monitor every element of Iran’s declared nuclear program with the permission of Iran. The inspectors would also ensure that none of the fissile material would be covertly carted off to any secret locations to build a bomb. Additional Protocol would be implemented to Iran’s IAEA Safeguards Agreement if the IAEA inspectors’ become suspicious of any locations. This would allow inspectors to have access and inspect any suspicious sites or activities (Before this agreement, Iran's, 2017).

However, several Middle Eastern experts voiced their concern that lifting the sanctions would only result in an increase in Iranian influence in the region (Zweiri, 2016; Al- Saad, 2018). They added that lifting the sanctions would contribute to Iran's financial activities and participation in proxy wars. This is because there was no plan to integrate Iran into the international community, and the focus was only on Iran's nuclear program (al zuweyrî, 2018). Moreover, there is insufficient evidence of Iran ever having the intentions of changing its policies in the region. Other experts such as Nephew (2016) took middle grounds and expressed their concerns regarding Obama's Nuclear deal but believed that the deal could bring a sense of stability to the Middle East.

The U.S presidential election in 2016 was won by Donald Trump, which brought changes to the U.S's foreign policy. Countries of the Middle East were well aware hard times would be faced if Trump won the elections. This awareness come from Trump promoting policies such as pulling out of JCPOA , the Muslim travel ban and taking Israel's side during his campaign. With all the alarming campaign promises, experts still argued that the GCC States were overall optimistic about Trump's ability to change the U.S- GCC relations for the better and impose a stricter policy on Iran (Feierstein, 2017).

Some experts believed that Donald Trump, being a businessman, would not use a strict tone when dealing with the Gulf States, or demand money in return for protection due to the trade relations (Gerges, 2016). However, this did not materialize, and Trump used a strict tone with the GCC States. Trump demanded that the Gulf States pay for, and take in, Syrian refugees, and then he demanded that Saudi Arabia pay for protection (Boubouche, 2017). Sebastian Sons, a Researcher at CARPO and a Political Analyst Saudi Arabia and Gulf states, said that Saudi Arabia had viewed

President Trump's visit and meeting with the Islamic countries as acknowledgment of Saudi Arabia's leadership position in the Islamic world (DW, 2017).

As for Trump's strategy when it came to Iran, it seemed that the Trump administration was on the same page and in favor of reimposing the sanctions. This was evident when the U.S Secretary of State Michael Pompeo said: "I'm sure no one in this room, but many here in Washington said that American sanctions alone won't work. Well, they've worked" (Pompeo, 2019).

Experts, on the other hand, debate the effectiveness of Trump's policies when it comes to the Gulf in general, and Iran specifically. Additionally, regardless of one's stance when it comes to effectiveness of Trump's policies, it would seem that the cooperation between the GCC states and Iran witnessed an increase due to the instability that threatened their common interests. However, the literature analyzing this increase in cooperation between the GCC states and Iran during the Trump era is limited. This is the gap addressed by the current research and thesis. This thesis shines a light on the evolving dynamics of the relationship between the neighboring states during the previously mentioned time period. The experts that agree on that Trump's policies had a negative affect on the GCC U.S relations, but they have two different arguments on the strategy that the GCC States followed. The first argument was that they looked alternative alliances for protection against Iran and use the Abraham Accords³ to support their argument. The second argument is the GCC States became more active in mediation and communication with Iran to balance the Iranian threat.

³ The Abraham Accords are a joint statement between Israel, the UAE, Bahrain and the U.S, signed on the 13th of August, 2020. The agreement states that the States undersigned, recognize the importance of maintaining and strengthening peace in the Middle East (U.S Department of State, 2020).

This study follows the second argument that the Trump administration's policies in the Gulf region caused tension resulting in an increase in GCC- Iranian cooperation, serving as an attempt to balance the threats facing their national securities. This was their adoption of the bandwagoning strategy. Therefore, even with the rivalry over regional domination, and the fact that the GCC-U.S alliance is much more powerful than Iran, the countries chose cooperation. Stephen Walt (1987) argues that states come together and are driven apart based on the effect that the interaction has on their individual security. Walt also explains that the same factors determine exactly how states choose their alliance partners, which shapes the evolution of internal systems of their governments as a whole. Walt supports his argument with three additional arguments. First, according to him, balancing, or alternatively neutralizing the threat, is far more common than Bandwagoning on the international scene. Second, he explains that ideology is less influential than balancing as a motive for alignment. Finally, political penetration⁴ or foreign aid by themselves are powerful enough as a cause of alignment. Accordingly, this theory might be applied to the behavior of the GCC states, which often serve as examples of small state behavior.

To prove the main hypothesis the thesis will need to answer the three main research questions which are:

⁴ Political Penetration: is "the covert or indirect manipulation of one state's political system by another" (Walt, 1985). Three of the forms that this can take are: the divided loyalties of public officials using their authority to bring states closer together; lobbying organizations influencing decision maker and the public opinion of a potential allies; and finally, using foreign propaganda to persuade elites and mass attitudes (Walt, 1985).

1. What did the U.S- Iran- GCC relations look like before President Trump?
2. What kind of changes did Trump bring to the U.S policies towards the Gulf?
3. What kind of changes in the GCC – Iranian relations were caused by Trump policies?

By taking a close look at the changes during the Trump presidency and how it threatened both Iranian and GCC interests, the research will try to prove that, as the theory suggested, the individual state security became the most important driver for the GCC countries. This in turn prompted the observation that their tensions with Iran will not endanger their own security, and thus, pushed the GCC member states towards the dialogue with Tehran.

The thesis also builds off the arguments and foundations of other expert work. For instance, Nader's (2013) argument that Trump caused a 'diplomacy deficit' and Zaccara's argument of GCC and Iran coming closer as a result of the short-sighted foreign policy by Trump administration are important in supporting the overall argument.

The thesis consists of three main chapters. The first chapter explains the situation in the Gulf shortly before Trump took office, as well as Trump's trail promises regarding the Gulf. Chapter 2 will be divided into two parts, the first will explain how campaign promises regarding the Gulf were implemented. Meanwhile, the second part discusses unexpected events that occurred during the period of Donald Trump's administration. Chapter 3 will discuss alliances and power dynamics in the Gulf, similar to the narratives of Gause (2003) and Al-Saad (2018) by taking a close look at the GCC-Iranian relations to understand the threats that they faced and

common interests. By using these approaches the research project aims to illuminate a more holistic and clearer picture on how the power struggle in the Gulf created instability which resulted in an increase in cooperation in order to protect common interests; and plays into the Iranian strategy mentioned in Mousavi (2018).

CHAPTER 1: IRAN-US-GCC TRIANGLE BEFORE TRUMP”

This chapter will answer the first research question, which was what did the U.S- Iran-GCC relations look like before President Trump? Modern U.S- GCC- Iran relations were shaped by the Islamic Revolution in Iran (1978-79) and subsequent Iran-Iraq war (1980-88). At the time, the Arab States of the Gulf felt threatened by their Shiite neighbor due to its advocating exporting the revolution, and united by creating what is known as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The Arab Gulf States also opened U.S military bases for more protection and cooperation. This created a rift united front in the face in what they saw as Iranian threats of ideological influence and military expansion in the Gulf (Cafiero, 2019). Iran was also under U.S sanctions, which made the GCC- U.S alliance feel safer. Nevertheless, the GCC states still had to associate with Iran for reasons such as trade, Islamic pilgrimage, and in cases of shared resources like the oil fields with the U.A.E, and gas fields with Qatar. However, the fear of Iran obtaining a nuclear weapon and threatening the region continued to haunt the GCC States, which was a constant aggravating factor in GCC-Iranian relations (Nader 2013).

However, the U.S President Barak Obama, who held office from 2009 to 2017, tried to find a solution for the U.S dispute with Iran and started lifting sanctions following what is known as the Iran nuclear deal. On July 14th, 2015, an agreement on the Iranian nuclear program was reached in Vienna that is known as The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Obama introducing this deal would cause a rift in the U.S-GCC relations. The new deal did bring improvement in the Iran-GCC relations. However, the GCC States did not do it whole heartedly and hoped that the U.S would come to its senses and pull out of the deal; thus, they still refused to become more diplomatically independent in their relations with Iran.

GCC- Iranian Relations on the Eve of Trump's Rise to Power

The Arab Spring⁵ broke out in early 2010 during the Obama administration and this caused a few Gulf States, with large Shia populations, to feel anxious of what Iran was going to do next. Bahrain in particular has a majority Shia population that has felt oppressed by the ruling Sunni regime and its systematic suppression of their political and economic ties. The Bahraini youth were inspired by the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt and took to the streets in protest in January 2011. However, the protests were quickly suppressed by the Bahraini government, with the help of Saudi and Emirati armed intervention. The governments of Saudi and Bahrain both accused Iran of directing the uprising. Bahrain and Saudi Arabia argued that the uprisings in their Shia majority Provinces was not due to their systematic religious, political, and economic discrimination, but as a result of Iranian conspiracies (Nader, 2013).

Among the Arab Gulf States, Saudi Arabia is the state that has been competing against Iran in a power struggle in the Arab region. This competition played out in the region through “proxy” forces in countries such as Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. However, neither Saudi Arabia nor Iran has been able to marginalize the other (Nader, 2013).

However, it seems that the Gulf Arab fears of Iran may be exaggerated. There is a deep-rooted historic Persian-Arab rivalry for reasons such as Iran's claim over Bahrain, and its occupation over the Emirati Islands of Tunb's and Aby Musa, as well as even older reasons. In reality, threats coming from the Iranian camp are limited due to unavoidable facts such as it not being very influential among the Gulf Arab

⁵ Arab Spring: a wave of pro-democracy protests and uprisings that accrued in the Middle East and North Africa beginning in 2010. These protests challenged their entrenched authoritarian regimes (Britannica, 2021).

populations, including the Shia minorities (Kaye and Wehrey, 2011). Another factor and the most important one is the economic ties between Iran and its Arab Gulf neighbors, undermining any aggressive military action. For example, closing off the Strait of Hormuz would result in economic losses on both sides, as well as the International community due to many countries around the world depending on oil and gas produced in the Gulf region. Such impact would make Iran hesitant to take such aggressive actions and this global impact will be touched on later on in when the tanker wars are discussed. Iran may have shown ambition to dominate the Gulf region, however, its ability to achieve this ambition is constrained due to its economic and conventional-military weaknesses (Nader, 2013). The fear of Iran obtaining nuclear weapons might also have been exaggerated. Thus, as stated by Nader, even if Iran obtained nuclear weapons, they would not have provided Iran with the ability to alter the balance of power in the Gulf: the U.S-GCC military and economic alliances were superior to Iran's abilities (Nader, 2013).

The Iran Nuclear Deal, also referred to as the JCPOA, coming into the picture in 2015 by President Obama brought mixed emotions to the Gulf Arab States. The public statements by the GCC governments indicated that they overall supported the JCPOA, but in some cases they were not as enthusiastic as Washington would have liked (Einhorn & Nephew, 2016). The Qatari Foreign Minister Khalid Al-Attiyah spoke on behalf of the Gulf Cooperation Council on the 3rd of August 2015, and he expressed their belief that the JCPOA was the best option and that the GCC states were confident that it would bring safety and stability to the region (Einhorn & Nephew, 2016).

Experts such as Einhorn and Nephew (2016) have suggested that the GCC endorsement of the nuclear deal was more of a calculated maneuver to maintain good

relations with the Obama administration, rather than a fullhearted approval. The Gulf Arab States really had no say in the implementation of JCPOA, so their best choice was to take advantage of the situation. They focused on their cooperation with the United States regarding other regional priorities and on gaining access to advanced U.S military hardware. This argument is supported by the United States' approval of an increase in arms packages trade to Gulf Arab partners in addition to its backing of the Saudi-led war in Yemen.

In addition to the military advantages there was an economic dimension to supporting the nuclear deal, particularly in the case of the UAE. The UAE is known for its long-standing trade ties with Iran so it would only be natural for it to have economic interests from the deal. The U.S sanctions imposed after 2011 resulted the United Arab Emirates suffering from significant business losses. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimated that removing the sanctions on Iran could result in adding approximately one percent of GDP to the economy of the U.A.E (Einhorn & Nephew, 2016). Economic considerations, therefore, became significant factors of consideration.

The majority of public statements of GCC officials might have supported the implementation of the JCPOA; however, this did not accurately reflect private opinion. GCC officials were concerned with the strategic and nonproliferation value of the nuclear deal itself, and this was reflected in notable comments given by Saudi Arabia during negotiations reflecting their doubts (Einhorn & Nephew, 2016). In September of 2015 King Salman met with President Obama and following their meeting the Saudi Foreign Minister Adel Al-Jubeir gave a statement in which he said: “we believe this agreement will contribute to security and stability in the region by preventing Iran from acquiring a nuclear capability... Now we have one less problem

to deal with, with regard to Iran, and we can now focus more on their nefarious activities in the region,” (Einhorn & Nephew, 2016). This statement echoed one of the arguments the Obama administration been making since the nuclear deal was made in July of 2015.

On the other hand, a few of the GCC States were openly supporting the nuclear deal on the basis of it restraining Iran’s ability to potentially acquire nuclear weapons. The GCC States that were most in favor of the nuclear deal were Kuwait, Oman, and Qatar, and they expressed their optimism regarding the potential security benefits (Einhorn & Nephew, 2016).

JCPOA’s Effect on GCC - Iranian Trade

GCC States being sovereign states each have their own relations with Iran including trade agendas. And the JCPOA had a different effect on the trade relations of each Gulf State separately. Iran was eager to start cooperation with the GCC States. In a phone call in July 2015 Hussain Asrar Haghghi, executive vice-president of the Iranian Business Council in Dubai, told the Gulf News: “It is a historic deal. We are going to see stronger business relations between Iran, UAE, and all other Gulf countries. Iran[’s] market will open up to firms from all across the globe,” (Cornwell, 2015). Iran’s relationship with each Gulf State was unique and the States had different plans for joint ventures for the new sanction free Iran.

Iran & the U.A.E

Investors from the UAE were looking forward to developing projects in Iran with the removal of the sanctions. Iran had always been an important trading partner of the UAE, especially when it came to non-oil export trade to Iran, which in 2014

was valued at \$11.5 bln (Raghu, 2015). The Iranian Business Council in Dubai said that they expected: “big growth” and they specifically named the trade of spare parts and food products. According to the Real Estate Regulatory Authority (Rera), in terms of value, Iranian nationals accounted for around 2.6% of Dubai’s real estate market in 2014 (Cornwell, 2015). Also, with plans to fix the infrastructure in sectors such as oil, ports, and airports the council said that there would be a big demand for cement and steel (Cornwell, 2015)). The UAE was also looking forward to expanding their flights to more destinations in Iran. A spokesperson for FlyDubai told the Gulf News in an email: “Iran, which is in our geographic focus, remains an untapped market with much potential” (Cornwell, 2015).

The U.A.E, known to have the largest trade with Iran, took advantage of the partial lifting of sanctions and jumped at the opportunity to benefit from the deal. According to the United Nations COMTRADE database on international trade, Iran’s exports to the Emirates in 2018 reached \$5.95 bln . Statistics show that the main imports to the U.A.E from Iran included: oils, mineral fuels, distillation products, Iron, steel, copper, salt, mate, machinery, carpets, etc....(See Table 1). Iranian exports to the U.A.E reached their peak in 2016, as soon as the sanctions were lifted, and started to decrease slowly after Obama left office in 2017 (See figure 1).

As for the U.A.E’s exports to Iran they reached a high of US\$7.08 Billion in 2019, according to the United Nations COMTRADE database on international trade. Imports from the U.A.E to Iran included: Electronics, machinery, Vehicles, tobacco, rubbers, fruits, nuts, cereals, pearls, etc.... (See Table 2). After the sanctions were removed, the U.A.E exports to Iran reached the highest in 2017 and slowly decreased with the sanctions going back into effect in 2018 (See figure 2).

Iran & Qatar

Qatar has always worked to keep a good relationship with Iran, given their shared gas field. There were no announced plans for new business ventures, instead relying only on normal demand and supply. However, this changed during the 2017 Blockade when new trade was initiated between Qatar and Iran that will be discussed later on.

Qatar exports to Iran reached US\$5.15 Million in 2019, according to the United Nations COMTRADE database on international trade. Qatari exports to Iran included: Machinery, precious metal compounds, live animals, plastics, vehicles, optical, medical apparatus, edible vegetables, paper, etc.... (See Table 3). Iran's imports from Qatar took off in 2016 and reached a high in 2017, around US\$16 Million, and decreased dramatically in 2018 with the sanctions being imposed once again (See figure 3).

According to the United Nations COMTRADE database on international trade Iran's exports to Qatar in 2018 reached US\$225.25 Million. Iran's main exports to Qatar included: Mineral fuels, edible vegetables, steel, iron, carpets, nuts, fruits, plaster, cement, plastic, live animals, etc.... (See Table 4). Iranian exports to Qatar were at a low in 2016 but witnessed a take off in 2017, possibly due to the blockade on Qatar which will be discussed later on in this thesis (See figure 4).

Iran & Oman

Oman was optimistic about the potential of capitalizing on the nuclear deal and signed a \$1bn deal with Tehran in early 2014 to construct a natural-gas pipeline from Iran to Oman (Raghu, 2015). There was another project that they hoped to be

revived, the Middle East to India Deepwater Pipeline, that aimed to export gas from Iran to India passing through Oman (Raghu, 2015).

By 2018 Iran's exports to Oman reached US\$728.57 Million, according to the United Nations COMTRADE database on international trade. Iranian exports to Oman included: Iron, steel, oils, live animals, fruit, melons, salt, Sulphur, plaster, cereals, carpets, zinc, etc.... (See Table 5). Omani- Iranian relations have always been good and a slow and steady increase in Iranian exports to the Oman can be seen with through the time period of negotiation regarding the nuclear deal and after partial removal of sanctions (See figure 5).

As for Oman's exports to Iran they reached US\$423.56 Million in 2018, according to the United Nations COMTRADE database on international trade. Omani exports to Iran included: Tobacco, electronic equipment, watches, clocks, boilers, Animals, Meats, vegetable fats and oils, fruits, nuts, aluminum, optical, etc.... (See Table 6). Omani exports to Iran increased with the lifting of sanctions and reached a the highest in 2017. However, it witnessed a decrease in 2018 likely due to the U.S pulling out of the nuclear deal (See figure 6).

Iran & Saudi Arabia

An outlier compared to its GCC colleagues, Saudi Arabia seemed to not be interested in increasing trade, due to the political differences between Riyadh and Tehran.

Iranian exports to Saudi Arabia reached US\$109.06 thousand in 2018, based on the United Nations COMTRADE database on international trade. Iranian exports to Saudi Arabia included: Vehicles, carpets, optical, photo, mineral fuels, oils, Glass

and glassware, ceramic products, edible fruits, printed books, newspapers, iron, mate, spices, etc.... (See Table 7). Unlike other GCC States Saudi did not benefit from the removal of Iranian sanctions and caused a dramatic decrease in imports coming in from Iran (See figure 7).

According to the United Nations COMTRADE database on international trade, in 2016, Saudi exports to Iran only reached US\$575.8 Thousand. Saudi exports to Iran included: Boilers, plastic, Paper, aluminum, felt, iron, steel, yams, twine, vehicles, pigments, tannins, etc.... (See Table 8). It seems that Iran reduced their imports to Saudi Arabia or that Iran wanted play tit for tat with Saudi and cut on their imports (See Figure 8).

Iran & Kuwait

Kuwait had a growing demand for natural gas and reports indicated that Kuwait and Iran were exploring possibility of Iran exporting gas to Kuwait through Iraq (Raghu, 2015).

After the lifting of the sanctions US\$253.12 Million were the revenues in 2018, as a result of Iran's export to Kuwait, according to the United Nations COMTRADE database on international trade. Iran's main exports to Kuwait included: Salt, stone, plaster, animal fodder, wastes of food industry, Iron, steel, edible fruits, nuts, oil seed, grain, edible vegetables, live animals, etc.... (See Table 9) Kuwait, like Oman, maintains good relations with Iran due to their shared borders and it appears a slow and steady increase in Iranian exports to Kuwait can be seen with through the time period of negotiation regarding JCPOA and after the partial removal of sanctions (Figure 9).

Revenues of Kuwaiti exports to Iran in 2018 reached US\$6.5 Million, according to the United Nations COMTRADE database on international trade. Main Kuwaiti exports to Iran included: Vehicles, boilers, vegetables, fruits, electrical, beverages, animal, vegetable fats, coffee, mate, dairy products, eggs, honey, ceramic products, soaps, candles, etc.... (See Table 10). Kuwaiti exports to Iran increased dramatically in 2016 and slowly started to decrease in the following years (See figure 10).

Iran & Bahrain

Like Saudi Arabia, Bahrain did not make grand business deals. However, they did increase the amount of trade.

Iran's exports to Bahrain in 2018 reached US\$11.81 Million, according to the United Nations COMTRADE database on international trade. Iran's exports to Bahrain included: Salt, animal fodder, fish, iron, steel, edible fruits, edible vegetables, oil seed, live animals, stone, plaster, cement, carpets, etc.... (See Table 11). A stable increase is evident starting from 2016 in Iranian exports to Bahrain, it could be a result of lifting the sanctions on Iran (See figure 11).

According to the United Nations COMTRADE database on international trade, Bahraini exports to Iran reached US\$823.42 Thousand in 2018. Bahraini exports to Iran included: Aluminum, rubbers, machinery, coffee, tea, mate, spices, rubber, plastics, articles of iron or steel, tanning, essential oils (See Table 12). Unlike the evident increase in Iranian exports to Bahrain, there was a decrease in Bahraini exports to Iran (See figure 12).

Overall, the GCC and Iran's economic cooperation brought positive outcomes and financial gain for both sides. The nuclear deal also revealed future potential for

expansion on joint ventures between Iran and the GCC States. This results in the conclusion that economic cooperation between both sides of the Gulf would be more fruitful than the tension that is caused by a sanctioned Iran.

However, Saudi's stubbornness and unwillingness to cooperate hindered the process, especially considering how Saudi puts pressure on the other Gulf States to take its side. The other GCC states have often accepted Saudi pressure due to the fear of Iran's nuclear program and foreign policy in the region. Therefore, Saudi and a few other states would be supportive in the future of Trump pulling out of the nuclear deal and reimposing sanctions. Another thing that Saudi would be optimistic about would be the increase in oil prices that would happen after Iranian oil was removed from the market, which would result in more revenue for Saudi. For Saudi to see the benefit of cooperation with Iran it would require it to pull away from the U.S as protection guarantee and be more open due to it being in its best interest.

Washington between Tehran and GCC

As mentioned in the beginning of this thesis, in July 14th 2015, an agreement on the Iranian nuclear program was reached in Vienna that is known as The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The JCPOA, also known as the nuclear deal, is an agreement reached by Iran and the P5+1 which are: France, China, Russia, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany (Arms Control Association, 2020). This was a new strategy in dealing with Iran in U.S foreign policy.

U.S. sanctions on Iran started close to 40 years ago (Kozhanov, 2011). The sanctions banned Americans from importing goods that were manufactured in Iran, whether they were brought to the U.S directly or through other countries. The sanctions did not stop there, they also prohibited American goods and services to Iran.

U.S citizens were not allowed to engage in economic activities, or even indirect or indirect trade with the Iranian government. With individuals unable to engage in trade with Iran, inevitably American companies fell under the same prohibitions. Oil and petrochemical products produced in Iran were not to be purchased by American companies or used for trade. Providing engineering services or modern technology to Iranian businesses was prohibited as well. In 1996 the Iran and Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA) was passed by the United States Congress that would later be renamed the Iran Sanctions Act (ISA). The act imposed economic sanctions on firms doing business with Iran that would contribute to the development of their petroleum resources (AN ACT To impose sanctions, 2016). These sanctions might have exhausted the Iranian economy, but they also pushed Iran to find alternative routes and as a result, it became highly self-sufficient. Obama's efforts to resolve the dispute brought hope that the Iranian economy could flourish once again.

Many questioned President Obama's actions in fears that it would only help Iran gain more money that would be used to fund their interference in the Arab region. Arab Experts suggest that the Gulf States felt that Iran was rewarded and not punished for its growing influence in the region (Zweiri, 2016). To assure the U.S Arab Gulf allies, Obama paid Riyadh a visit and gave a speech at the GGC, aiming to put their fears to rest. Obama expressed the U.S' commitment to protect their allies and interests in the region and said: "I reaffirmed the policy of the United States to use all elements of our power to secure our core interests in the Gulf region and to deter and confront external aggression against our allies" (Rampton, 2016).

Obama did not only have to deal with criticism from the Gulf States, but he also needed to prove the effectiveness of this strategy to America in general. Obama's successor Donald Trump (2017- 2021) in particular was one of his main critics

and described his policies towards Iran as “soft” (Torbati & Schectman, 2018). However, just a year before leaving office, President Obama would surprise the world with the first fruits of his deal, which was a prisoner exchange with Iran.

After almost a year of secret negotiations with Iran, Obama announced that five U.S citizens were successfully freed after being held captive in Iran. The U.S president named the five Americans that Iran had released: the former U.S. Marine Amir Hekmati, Jason Rezaian, student Matthew Trevithick, businessman Nosratollah Khosravi and one Iranian- American whose name was not released and would be kept secret by the White House for the time being (Torbati & Schectman, 2018). However, Washington was well aware that compromises had to be made.

In return, Iran benefited when the Obama administration agreed to free or drop charges held against seven Iranians detained in the United States. Almost all of the Iranians were accused of, or imprisoned due to, violating the U.S. trade sanctions on Iran. The Obama administration would also agree to dropping charges held against 14 Iranians that lived abroad. In January of 2016 and just a day after the prisoners were set freed, the United States announced that \$1.7 billion it would be released to Iran (Torbati & Schectman, 2018). The released money was connected to a long-running arms sale dispute and separate from the prisoner swap.

The Obama administration might have made many compromises when dealing with Iran. However, Obama delivered a statement on January 17th, 2016, in which he assured that the U.S continues to stand firm in opposing Iran’s destabilizing behavior as well as Iran’s threats against Israel and the Gulf partners. He also expressed American condemnation for Iran’s support of violent proxies in countries such as Syria and Yemen. Obama also made it clear that many of the sanctions would continue due to Iran’s violation of human rights, support of terrorism, and ballistic

missile program (The Obama White House, 2017). This would make it clear to Iran that the U.S might have compromised on many things, but still would not hesitate to use the sanctions in cases where Iran would show aggressive behavior or threaten U.S interests in the region.

Managing the GCC Dissatisfaction

The nuclear deal inevitably caused a rift in the U.S-GCC relations (Roberts, 2015). The Gulf States felt disappointed with the changes that came with the Obama administration, they believed that the United States had pulled back from the region, giving more space to Iran to push forward and maneuver in the region. They were also agitated when Presidents Obama described them in a magazine interview as “free-riders” in U.S. security efforts and encouraged them to “share” the region with Tehran (Rampton, 2016). Obama acknowledged the strains that have afflicted ties between the U.S and its Gulf allies, and during his final visit to Riyadh in April of 2016, addressed the GCC and tried to use a balanced approach in which he assured them that the U.S is committed to protecting its allies and interests in the region, but at the same time reminded them of their shortcomings.

President Obama started out by reminding the GCC States that they have so far worked together on shared concerns such as the conflicts in Iraq, Syria and Yemen. After that he said: “Even with the nuclear deal we recognize collectively that we continue to have serious concerns about Iranian behavior” (Rampton, 2016); this would assure them that the U.S is aware and alert for any potential threats from Iran and that it acknowledges their concerns. President Obama affirmed the reality that the United States will remain deeply involved in the security of the Gulf and would continue to cooperate closely with the Gulf monarchies, to strengthen their armed

forces, as well as share intelligence aimed at neutralizing the threats of Islamist militant groups.

After reassuring the GCC States of the U.S having everything under control, during the same visit of April 2016 to Riyadh, he switched tones when addressing King Salman of Saudi Arabia. He expressed that the U.S wished to see more democratic reform and improvement when it came to human rights. Then he added to the concerns that there was a proposed bill in the U.S. Congress that would lift the immunity of Riyadh if any Saudi officials were to be found guilty of being involved in the attacks on September 11th, 2001(Rampton, 2016). Obama said that he opposed the bill because of the possibility of it leading to cases being brought against the U.S in foreign courts. Obama was most likely the strictest with Saudi due it being the most resistant Gulf State regarding the Nuclear deal.

Each of these incidents and factors illustrate that the relations between the U.S and the GCC States leading to the 2016 U.S elections contained hidden tension, which the U.S managed by pointing out that the GCC States need to have trust in the deal and to focus on other regional issues. After that visit the GCC States hoped for the best and tried to benefit from the situation. However, a few months later Donald Trump would be elected into the White House and the GCC States would hope that the new president would mend the rift that was caused by the Obama Administration's policies.

Trump's Campaign Trail and the Gulf Region

The GCC states were expecting Obama's successor to repair U.S. ties with the region and Muslim world. However, the candidate options were not very promising. This was especially true in the case of Donald Trump whose remarks during his

election campaign showed that these calculations were wrong, pushing the GCC to rethink their strategies in case he was to win the elections.

Following President Obama was President Donald Trump, who was very critical of the Obama administration's policies during his campaign trail. He openly spoke of his disapproval of many policies regarding the Middle East and promised to bring change if he took office. However, Obama was not the only one getting rough criticism from Trump. The Middle East, and the countries in the Gulf region particularly felt attacked. Reuters highlighted the fears circling in the Middle East in an article and it said: "The future of the Middle East's top foreign ally is, in the words of a Saudi prince, an anti-Muslim "disgrace", openly disdainful of Arab security partnerships, who believes Saudi Arabia would cease to exist for long without the United States"(King, 2016).

Trump generally irritated Muslims everywhere due to his controversial statements against Muslims. One of Trump's promises during his campaign trail was that if he were to become president that he would move the U.S embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, which is divided between both Israeli and Palestinian claims (BBC, 2020). Trump, siding with Israeli claims, caused tensions among Arab and Muslim communities. He also called for surveillance of mosques in the United States, which would affect mainly American Muslims. However, in December of 2015 he called for a ban on Muslims entering the United States (Al-Qassemi, 2016). This is where the Gulf Cooperation Council leaders expressed their concern in a statement that said: "deep concern at the increase of hostile, racist and inhumane rhetoric against refugees in general and Muslims in particular" (Al-Qassemi, 2016). GCC businessmen, including Saudi Prince Al Waleed bin Talal and Emirati real estate developer Khalaf Al-Habtoor, felt that their investments were under attack, and this

caused them to publicly criticize Trump. This was alarming, if Trump were to become President this could have led the GCC investments to be withdrawn from the United States.

The remarks made by Trump during his campaign were less than reassuring for Gulf States. Among the Gulf States, Saudi Arabia in particular, was a target during his speeches, and in August of 2015 he stated that he was not “a big fan” of the country (Al-Qassemi, 2016). Trump every now and then during the campaign, would say that United States had been paying too much to back Saudi and would say that Saudi be in trouble without them. He also went so far to say: "the primary reason we're with Saudi Arabia is because we need the oil. Now we don't need the oil so much"(Al-Qassemi, 2016).

Other than Trump’s previously aggravating remarks the GCC States were concerned with Trump’s complete lack of fundamental knowledge of the main players in the region. Trump was completely honest and admitted to Hugh Hewitt that he really knew very little of al-Qaeda’s Ayman Zawahiri, ISIS’ Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, Hezbollah’s Hassan Nasrallah, and Jabhat al-Nusra’s Abu Mohammed Al-Jolani. He justified his lack of knowledge by saying: "I think by the time we get to office, they’ll all be changed," which was illogical considering that many of these figures had been around for years (Al-Qassemi, 2016). There were other topics that the GCC States were unclear of regarding Trump’s stance, such as the government in Egypt and Al-Asad regime in Syria. However, when it came to Syria in October of 2015, Trump called on the GCC States to build a safe zone on a large piece of land in Syria. Later on, in February of 2016, he changed his tone when mentioning the idea of a safe zone in Syria and said: "I will build a safe zone. I will get the Gulf states to pay for it” (Al-Qassemi, 2016).

GCC leaders only saw eye-to-eye with Trump to a certain extent. Despite the GCC States being alarmed by many of Trump's statements, they believed that there was hope due to the Gulf states and Trump agreeing on a common stance regarding Iran. The GCC States might have publicly appeared to welcome the nuclear deal, but the fact was that they, with the exception of Oman, still held serious concerns about Iran's nuclear deal. GCC leaders felt that the nuclear negotiations could have given them the opportunity to commit Iran to refrain from meddling in Arab states Affairs (Al-Qassemi, 2016).

Iran, like the other Gulf States, got its share of remarks as well. Among statements that Trump gave regarding Iran was his refusal to address Iran's leader by his preferred title, he commented saying: "I guarantee you I will be never calling him the Supreme Leader... I'll say, 'Hey baby, how ya doing?' I will never call him the Supreme Leader" (Johnson, 2016). In a radio interview, Trump criticized the Iran nuclear deal and referred to it as "horrible and laughable," and then continued to say: "it's one of the most incompetent contracts I've even seen" then added: "I've never seen more of a one-sided deal, I think, in my life" (Al-Qassemi, 2016). Trump expressed many times his discontent with the nuclear deal, saying that he would find the "out" clause in JCPOA and then renegotiate the whole deal completely. He said that he wanted to make a better deal with Iran or pull out of the deal and reimpose the sanctions.

Iran, on the other hand, did not show much reaction during the election time, because no one really believed that he would become President. They did express sentiments however, that if he did win the presidency, they would refuse to make a new deal that did not work for them, and if he chooses to reimpose the sanctions, they are not worried (Mousavi, 2018). Iran's explanation for not being worried about the

sanctions was because they already have years of experience of living under sanctions and have reached a level self-sufficiency in many fields. They also planned on enduring Trump's presidency in hopes that a more cooperative president would come into office next.

Overall, before Trump, the GCC- U.S -Iran relations were already quite complicated. The GCC- U.S relations were fractured due to the Gulf States not agreeing with Obama over the nuclear deal. This fracture was out of the GCC States' fear that with the improving U.S-Iran relations, the GCC States would be left alone to face the increasing Iranian influence in the region. Meanwhile, the GCC were starting to increase cooperation with Iran, unenthusiastically. The two main goals were to please the U. S and keep the alliance afloat. As well as benefit economically from the trade with Iran.

Moreover, with the possibility that Trump could win the elections, the GCC States expected the new president to fix the fracture in their relations and be stricter with Iran. From their prospective, the nuclear deal weakened their alliance, and it being out of the picture would bring back the united front in the face of Iran. As for the U.S relations with Iran, Iran was finally cooperating with the U.S and their economy was just starting to see improvement and had high hopes for the future. Then Trump came to the picture and Iran knew that they were going to see hard years but was willing to wait for the next cooperative U.S president. However, it is highly doubtful that despite any of the earlier predictions, anyone saw the changes that Trump would bring and the unexpected escalation in tension between the U.S and Iran that would threaten the security of the Gulf region as a whole.

CHAPTER 2: TRUMP IN OFFICE

This second chapter will answer the second research question regarding the kind of changes that Trump brought to the U.S policies towards the Gulf. In January 2017, Donald Trump was sworn into the White House as the 45th President of the United States of America. His first international trip was a visit to Saudi Arabia where he met with all the key Muslim State leaders, besides Iran. President Hassan Rouhani commented on not attending the summit and said: “In my view, the summit in Saudi Arabia was a ceremonial gathering and had no political and practical value” (Majidiyar, 2017). He also warned in his first speech after summit to the United States and its regional allies that stability would not be achieved in the Middle East without Tehran’s help (Majidiyar, 2017).

President Trump signed a major weapons deal with Saudi and gave a speech on Islam and the battle against terrorism. Trump’s visit was seen as highly symbolic of Saudi’s position in the Middle East. According to Al Jazeera’s Washington editor James Bays, the Saudis were very “proud and excited” that the US president chose the Gulf State for his first stop (Al Jazeera, 2017). They considered it an effort put on his part to repair Washington’s ties with its Arab ally. He also added: “They want a reset of the relationship with the U.S. They were not happy with Obama, and they were not happy with the US policy in Yemen and in Syria,” (Al Jazeera, 2017). The Saudi political analyst Ahmed Alibrahim said in an interview with Al Jazeera that the Saudis saw that day as a “great day” for their relations with the U.S (Al Jazeera, 2017). Before Trump visited Saudi, their Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir said, that the visit will: “bolster the strategic partnership between the two countries” (Al Jazeera, 2017). This all shows how optimistic the GCC states were about the visit and how much hope they had that Trump would help secure the region.

Implementing Campaign Promises

After taking office Trump wasted no time and just 7 days after inauguration, on January 27th, 2017, he signed an Executive Order that would ban foreign nationals from seven Muslim countries⁶, among them Iran, from visiting the U.S (ACLU, 2020). He also would spend the rest of the year threatening to pull out of the nuclear deal and pressuring Congress to say that Iran was not following through with the deal. In October of 2017, Trump's administration sent a request to Congress asking them to enact a bill defining what would incite the U.S to reimpose sanctions on Iran (Landler & Sanger, 2017). For the GCC States, there was hope of Trump fixing the rift in the U.S-GCC relations and pushing back Iran's influence in the regions, so they would finally get what they wanted. As for Iran it would mean that years of negotiations with Obama administration for a better economy and slowly being reintegrated into the international economy was put on hold. Iran would have to go back to strategies used before the nuclear deal, wait for the Trump presidency to pass and hope for a more cooperative president to take office.

Pulling from the Nuclear Deal

President Trump announced in May of 2018 that he was withdrawing from the JCPOA, unravelling his predecessor Barack Obama's signature foreign policy achievement. In doing this he isolated the U.S from its Western allies (Landler, 2018). Trump had been scorning the nuclear deal, and repeatedly threatening to tear it up during the 2016 presidential race. But needed a new strategy to bring Iran to the

⁶ These countries are Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen.

negotiation table, and viewed his policy toward North Korea as successful. He used a policy of “maximum pressure” where North Korea was put under intense diplomatic and economic pressure to the point that the leadership chose to forsake its nuclear ambitions in return for relief (Joycelyn, 2020). And that was motivation enough for Trump to pull out of the nuclear deal, and he decided to use the same maximum pressure strategy with Iran (Landler, 2018).

President Rouhani announced that Iran would stay in JCPOA for the time being despite the U.S not being in it, but would be ready to go back to enriching uranium. This was an indirect way of letting the U.S and the International community know that Iran was going to follow a tit-for-tat strategy with the U.S; if the U.S was going to impose sanctions, Iran would do what the U.S dreaded most and enrich Uranium. He also added: “We will take our steps towards peace and security in the region and the wider world. But if we see that our interests cannot be guaranteed, then I will address the nation and I will inform them of the government’s decisions” (Oman Times, 2018). After pulling out of the nuclear deal, Iran had 90 days ending on August 6th, 2018, to reach a new deal with the U.S before the following sanctions would be reimposed, according to the U.S Treasury Department (Breuninger, 2018):

- Sanctions on any U.S dollars purchased or obtained by Iran.
- Sanctions on Iran’s trade of gold or any other precious metals.
- Sanctions on Iran’s trade, supply, sale of steel and aluminum. In addition to coal, graphite, and certain software used for “integrating industrial processes”.
- Sanctions on any significant purchases or sale of Iranian riyals, or any maintenance of significant funds or accounts outside of Iran using Iranian riyals.
- Sanctions on the issue of Iranian debt.
- Sanctions on autos.

Also, on August 6th, 2018, the United States revoked certain permissions that were given to Iran under the deal. This includes stopping the exportation of Iran's carpets and foods into the U.S. In addition, certain licensing-related transactions were stopped. Furthermore, if the resolution was not reached at the end of the 180-day mark on November 4th, 2018, another set of sanctions that were lifted would once again be implemented. These sanctions included (Breuninger, 2018):

- Sanctions on Iranian shipping, shipping sectors, and ports.
- Sanctions on the purchase of petroleum and petrochemical products for a number of oil companies from Iran.
- Sanctions on any foreign financial institution that performs their transaction through the Central Bank of Iran or other Iranian financial institutions.
- Sanctions on certain financial messaging services provisions to Iran's central bank and Iranian financial institutions.
- Sanctions on reinsurance, insurance, and underwriting services provision.
- Sanctions on the Iranian energy sector.

By November 5th 2018, U.S.-owned foreign entities were no longer permitted to participate in certain transactions with Iran (Breuninger, 2018). Also, certain sanctions on Iranian individuals were reimposed. The sanctions hurt Iran's economy that was just recovering from the previous sets of sanctions. However, the Iranian government did not budge and stood by their statements that they will not negotiate any new deals and that they will only go back to the previous one. When President Trump saw that reimposing sanctions was not going to bring Iran to the negotiation table, he decided that it was time to apply his strategy of maximum pressure and impose new sanctions. The aim of his strategy was to hit Iran and its economy harder and force it to come to the negotiation table. sanctions. Trump thought that he could

use the same strategy that he used with North Korea, not thinking that what works with one country might not work with another - especially a very experienced country like Iran.

Imposing New Sets of Sanctions

In June of 2019, President Trump announced a new set of sanctions were being imposed on Iran (Wong, 2019). The step was taken to step-up Trump's policy of maximum pressure, and this time it was by pressuring the nation's leaders, the Supreme Leader Khamenei and his office, as well as squeezing Iran's economy further (Wong, 2019). The U.S said that it was a respond to what it described as aggressive acts by Tehran. The aggressive acts mentioned by Trump were referring to the attacks on ships in the strait of Hormuz on June 13th, 2019, that were the start of the Second Tanker war discussed later on in this chapter. The U.S had previously cut off all revenues from Iran's oil exports, the livelihood of the Iranian economy. The aim of these sanctions was to prevent top Iranian officials from using the international banking system and any financial vehicles that other countries – including European nations- had set up. However, it was unlikely that Iranian officials would have kept considerable assets in international banks or use them for transactions. Therefore, pressure from these sanctions was minimal (Wong, 2019).

In response, Javad Zarif, the then foreign minister of Iran, tweeted saying that the sanctions were not an "alternative to war; they ARE war" (The Jerusalem Post, 2019). He also argued that Trump's use of the term "obliteration" against Iran is a reference to genocide, which is a war crime (The Jerusalem Post, 2019). Zarif added that negotiations and threats are "mutually exclusive" and referred to the concept of only a short war with Iran as an "illusion". Then on July 31st, 2019, the United States

imposed sanctions on Javad Zarif, which complicated the chances of reaching a diplomatic resolution to the crisis (BBC, 2019).

The Trump administration took a step back from their policy of “maximum pressure” against Iran later, suggesting the possibility of an ease of economic sanctions prior to starting a new round of nuclear negotiations with Iran. Trump warned Iran against starting the production of materials used in the making of nuclear bombs – as the Iranian government had been threatening to do- and said that he was ready for diplomatic talks (Jake, 2019). Reporters at the White House were told by President Trump: “I do believe they’d like to make a deal... If they do, that’s great; and if they don’t, that’s great too. But they have tremendous financial difficulty, and the sanctions are getting tougher and tougher” (Jake, 2019).

Iran had long insisted that the U.S would have to lift sanctions before they would meet with Trump, and this is why, when reporters asked Trump if he would consider easing sanctions to help secure a meeting with Iran, he responded by saying: “We’ll see what happens” (Jake, 2019). According to the official Islamic Republic News Agency, in a telephone call between President Rouhani and President Emmanuel Macron in September 2019, Rouhani said: “If the sanctions remain in place, negotiations with the U.S. administration have no meaning,” (Jake, 2019). At this point it was evident that Trump’s strategy of “maximum pressure” was unsuccessful in bringing Iran to the negotiation table, and a new strategy would be needed.

Iran did not surrender to Trump’s pressuring, but that did not mean that the sanctions did not hurt the Iranian economy. According to the Central Bank of Iran, after the nuclear deal was implemented in 2015, Iran's hurt economy from decades of sanctions slowly started to bounce back and the gross domestic product (GDP) grew

12.3%. However, the sanctions being reimposed resulted in Iran's GDP reducing by an estimated 4.8% in the 2018. Moreover, according to the International Monetary Fund's forecast Iran's GDP shrunk another 9.5% in 2019 (BBC, 2019) (see figure: 13). Meanwhile, unemployment rates rose from 14.5% in 2018 to 16.8% in 2019 (BBC, 2019). As for inflation President Rouhani had managed to get it down to 9% in 2017, and the IMF estimated that it soared to 30.5% in 2018 (BBC, 2019). The World Bank stated that the inflation in Iran was especially high when it came to food items, and that the rural population had been disproportionately affected.

As for the crude oil production, according to the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in 2018, Iran was exporting around 2.3 million bpd (BBC, 2019). However, by October of 2019, Iran's crude oil production had dropped to about 2.1 million bpd (BBC, 2019). With these hard hits to the economy Iran was not about to do nothing and started their tit-for-tat reaction, even their neighbors were not safe.

The GCC States, seen as close allies to the U.S by Iran and most of them not being happy with the nuclear deal, would feel the rage. The anger was evident especially when tankers in Saudi and U.A.E ports would be targeted directly or indirectly by Iran in the second tanker war, which will be discussed later on.

Demanding that Saudi Pays

On the other side of the Gulf, the Arab States were a little more optimistic about the new U.S President. However, while Saudi Arabia might have thought that tension was bad between them and the Obama administration, they did not realize that Trump was not going to be much better. In fact, Trump from his campaign days would constantly demand that Saudi, and the Gulf States in general pay, for almost

anything he could think of, and he described them by saying: “they have nothing but money” (Ebbs, 2017). After Trump took office, the undiplomatic remarks regarding Saudi continued, during a rally in the U.S State of Mississippi Trump said: “We protect Saudi Arabia. Would you say they’re rich? And I love the King, King Salman. But I said ‘King - we’re protecting you - you might not be there for two weeks without us - you have to pay for your military’” (Staff, 2018). Bloomberg interviewed Saudi’s crown prince Mohammed bin Salman, and during the interview he said that Saudi existed 30 years in the region before the U.S came into the picture, and that Saudi would not pay for its security (RT, 2018). Mohammed bin Salman also expressed that the relations have not been affected by Trump’s remarks and said that he loved working with Trump (Bloomberg, 2018). Whether the prince meant what he was saying regarding loving working with Trump or he said it just to keep good relations with the U.S President, Trump would go on to apply more and more pressure on the Kingdom.

In October of 2018, the Trump administration announced that they were sending U.S troops to Saudi Arabia (Stewart & Ali, 2019). This was after Saudi oil facilities were attacked, and Washington and Riyadh accused Iran of standing behind them. However, in a press conference at the White House President Trump could not help but combine mentioning Saudi Arabia with paying. While announcing that the troops were being sent to Saudi, he said: “You read where we’re sending some troops to Saudi Arabia. That’s true. Because we want to help Saudi Arabia. They have been a very good ally. They’ve agreed to pay for the cost of those troops. They’ve agreed to pay fully for the cost of everything we’re doing over there. . . Saudi Arabia is paying for 100 percent of the cost, including the cost of our soldiers. And that negotiation took a very short time — like, maybe, about 35 seconds” (Kessler, 2019). Many

people including Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the U.S House of Representatives, questioned if Saudi actually agreed to pay. Trump was dominating and taking away Saudi's sovereignty, and not in an under the table way, but in a publicly humiliating, which was not good for Saudi's public image.

Later on, President Trump would apply pressure on the Kingdom again, but this time it would be by attempting to control oil production through Saudi. On April 2nd, 2020, President Trump called the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and informed him that unless the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) started cutting down on oil production, he would no longer stand in the way of lawmakers from passing legislation to pull U.S troops from Saudi (Gardner, Holland, Zhdannikov, & El Gamal, 2020). The announcement of production cuts came 10 days after the phone call between President Trump and the Crown Prince. According to a U.S senior administration officials, the Crown Prince was so shocked by the threat that he ordered his assistants to leave the room before continuing the conversation in private. In April 2020, Reuters asked President Trump during an interview at the White House if he mentioned to the Crown Prince that the U.S would pull its forces from the Kingdom, and he replied to that by saying: "I didn't have to tell him." (Gardner, Holland, Zhdannikov, & El Gamal, 2020).

Trump's actions were due to his desire to protect the U.S. oil industry from a historic meltdown in prices as governments around the world shut down to fight the Coronavirus global pandemic. A senior U.S. official summarized the argument to Reuters by saying that they told Saudi leaders: "We are defending your industry while you're destroying ours" (Gardner, Holland, Zhdannikov, & El Gamal, 2020). Trump took advantage of Saudi being a powerful State in Gulf region and an important oil

producer to control the global economy. However, the Trump effect did not end there, and unexpected events would take place due to this build up of pressure.

Unexpected Turns in the Gulf During the Trump Presidency

Trump's strategy of maximum pressure on Iran and at many times irrational action, resulted in many unexpected events happening in the world during his presidency. The Gulf was no exception and witnessed many events such as the blockade on Qatar, the second taker war, the attacks on Abqaiq–Khurais oil infrastructure, and the assassination of General Soleimani. These were all events that changed the features of the region and affected the security of the countries in the region as well the dynamics of relations within the US-GCC-Iran triangle.

The Blockade on Qatar

On June 5th, 2019, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the U.A.E, Bahrain, and Egypt announced they were blockading Qatar, and that they would be cutting all diplomatic ties with their neighboring State (GCO, 2021). The blockading States closed their air, sea, and land spaces to Qatar. An unexpected campaign against Qatar escalated rapidly after the Qatar National News agency was hacked and misinformation and fabricated news was spread. In a press conference five days after the blockade, President Trump said: “The nation of Qatar has historically been a funder of terrorism at a very high level, the time had come to call on Qatar to end its funding” (GCO, 2021). These statements were surprising from President Trump considering Qatar's relations with the U.S had not seen any turbulence.

The countries of the blockade accused Qatar of exporting and supporting terrorism and issued a list of 13 demands⁷ that Qatar must fulfil before the blockade would be lifted. Qatar refused the list and said that such demands interfere with the State's sovereignty. Qatar, like the States of Bahrain, Kuwait, and the UAE, is aware of their small geographical size and their position between the two competing States of Saudi and Iran. However, to create balance and push against Riyadh's dominance they all engage in a certain level of diplomacy with Tehran (Vakil, 2018). Qatar's ties with Iran came in useful during the blockade especially with almost all of its ports to the world closed off. The blockade exposed a deep division among the Arab Gulf States, and it continued till January of 2021. However, soon instability would come to the Gulf, but this time it would be due to the conflict between the U.S and Iran.

The Second Tanker War

The second tanker war, widely referred to as the Gulf crisis, is a series of events that took place between Iran, the U.S, and their allies during the time period of 2019 and 2021.

Tensions between Iran and the U.S took a turn on the 20th of June 2019, when the Islamic Revolutionary Guard shot down a U.S. surveillance drone. Hossein

⁷ The demands included: Shutting down the Turkish military base in Qatar, cutting ties with all "terrorist, sectarian and ideological" groups and adding them to current and future "terror lists", the stop of all funding of individuals, groups and organizations designated "terrorists" by the blockading countries, the U.S and others. Handing over all listed "terrorists" and criminals wanted by the four countries and the US and all of their information, shutting down all news outlets funded directly and indirectly by Qatar, including: Arabi 21, Rassd, Al Araby Al Jadeed, Mekameleen and Middle East Eye, and more (Chughtai, 2018).

Salami, the IRGC commander, referred to the shoot-down as "clear message" to the U.S (Al Arabiya, 2019). Iran said that the drone had entered its air space and assured that they were not seeking war but were ready for it. U.S. Central Command confirmed that Iranian surface-to-air missiles had shot down the drone but denied that the drone had violated Iranian airspace, and that it was in the international airspace of the Strait of Hormuz. Conflicting GPS coordinates for the drone's location were provided by Iran and the U.S which made it difficult to determine if the drone had entered Iran's 12-mile territorial boundary.

After the drone was shot down, Trump ordered officials to respond with a military strike on Iran. However, he called off the order after being told that it could possibly kill around 150 Iranians. It was reported that on the 22nd of June 2019, Trump had approved cyber-attacks that disabled IRGC computer systems used to control rocket and missile launches (Carter, 2019). The next day Rouhani blamed the U.S for the high tensions in the region by interfering in military presence. Gholam Rashid, Iranian Major General, warned the U.S that the consequences would be "uncontrollable", and a conflict would break out (Karimi, 2019). After the drone was shot down, the U.S continuously deployed military assets to the Gulf. The U.S had deployed around a dozen F-22 Raptor fighter jets to the Air Base of Al Udeid in Qatar by June 28th 2019 (Burns, 2019).

The U.S would strike back and on July 18th, 2019; the Pentagon said that the USS Boxer took defensive action against an Iranian drone that was dangerously close to the ship in the Gulf (Superville & Burns, 2019). Abbas Araghchi, Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister, denied that Iran had lost any of their drones (Staff, 2019). The commander of the U.S. Central Command, General McKenzie, claimed that USS Boxer might have brought a second Iranian drone (Chappell, 2019).

After the drone shooting-down exchange, the next phase would be an exchange of tanker seizing. According to the British Royal Navy, on July 11th, 2019, an Iranian attempt to capture a British oil tanker was blocked by the HMS Montrose that was transiting through the Strait of Hormuz. However, only after nine days the IRGC forces seized a British-flagged tanker Stena Impero in a raid (Marcus, 2019). Iran sent a letter to the United Nations, which said that the Stena Impero had ran into and damaged an Iranian vessel and had ignored warnings sent out by Iranian authorities (Hand, 2019). Iran's seizure of the ship sparked a diplomatic crisis with United Kingdom. The British government demanded that Iran release the ship and warned of consequences. Iran said that it had seized the ship in response to the British seizing Grace 1 in Gibraltar and hinted that Iran would release Stena Impero in exchange for the release of Grace 1 (Marcus, 2019).

On the 14th of July, an oil tanker with the Panamanian flag, MT Riah, that was operating in the UAE, disappeared from ship tracking maps after crossing the Strait of Hormuz (Moreno, 2019). The Iranian IRGC seized an Iraqi tanker on August 4th, 2019 and said that it was smuggling oil to other Arab countries. Britain joined the U.S.-led International Maritime Security Construct to protect its oil tankers in the Gulf and surrounding seas from Iranian attacks.

Gibraltar released Grace 1 on August 15th, 2019, after Iran had assurance that the oil would not be sold an entity sanctioned by the EU. The United States Department requested permission to allow them to seize the ship, but they rejected the request. The Iranian government later released a statement saying that it had issued no assurances that the oil would not be sent to Syria, and that it would continue its journey to Syria, and renamed the ship Adrian Darya 1 (Staff, 2019). After releasing

the ship, the U.S. Office of Foreign Assets Control sanctioned the tanker Adrian Darya 1 -previously Grace 1- and its captain.

The International Maritime Security Construct (IMSC) began official operations in Bahrain to protect the shipping lines on November 7th, 2019 (Al Jazeera, 2019). The command center for the coalition was stationed in the kingdom to protect the global oil supply from potential threats during this crisis.

The U.S continued to push back against Iran and tensions continued to rise in the Gulf, but Iran did not expect what the Trump administration would do next. Trump would order the assassination of one of the most important Iranian military figures.

These events showed that Iran was not intimidated and would put pressure on the most important oil and gas strait in the world. Iran might have not closed off the Strait of Hormuz, but still was able to cause economic losses for the countries of the Gulf, as well as the international community. Any further escalation would cause even more economic loss to the trade in the region. Iran already suffering losses due to sanctions resulted in a failure of the U.S-GCC alliance effectiveness securing the region and keeping Iran from interfering with the trade passing through the Strait. This all would mean that securing interests would require de-escalation tension and possibly opening lines of communication with Iran.

Attacks on Abqaiq and Khurais Oil Infrastructure

On September 14, 2019, Yemen's Houthi rebels claimed drone attacks on two key oil installations inside of Saudi borders (Hubbard & Karasz & Reed, 2019). The damaged facilities process the vast majority of Saudi's crude output which risked the disruption of oil supplies in the world. However, due to the escalation between the U.S and Iran, as well as the well-known Iranian support of the Houthi rebels, it led the

U.S to accuse Iran of being behind the attacks. The damage to the two oil infrastructures reduced Saudi's oil production by 5.7 million barrels per day (Lee, 2019).

U.S Secretary of State Mike Pompeo backed his accusations that there was “no evidence the attacks came from Yemen” (Hubbard & Karasz & Reed, 2019). However, he did not mention any possible launching sites. Meanwhile, on the Saudi side, they refrained from pointing fingers directly towards Iran. Saudi confronting Iran would not be the best course of action at this point. Considering the war in Yemen against the Houthis, and the escalating tension in the Gulf between Iran and the U.S, Saudi accusing Iran could have escalated the situation and prompted an increase in attacks on Saudi land.

President Trump wasted no time in an attempt to take advantage of the situation and make a deal. On a phone call with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, he condemned the attack and offered U.S support to Saudi with self-defense (Hubbard & Karasz & Reed, 2019). By now it was obvious that Trump would find a way to protect U.S interests in the region and make Saudi pay for it, and this is where the idea of deploying U.S soldiers to Saudi came into the picture. However, the United Nations' investigators reported that the Houthis had acquired advanced drones that were capable of reaching targets ranging up to 1496 km (Hubbard & Karasz & Reed, 2019). This opened the possibility that the drones used might have actually been flown from Houthi-controlled territory in Yemen and that Iran was not necessarily directly behind the attack, but not innocent of the accusations. After all, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps was training its militia proxies in many regions from Lebanon to Yemen (Hubbard & Karasz & Reed, 2019). According to sources in

Iran with knowledge of the training program, the training includes more sophisticated warfare using drones (Hubbard & Karasz & Reed, 2019).

The attacks on the oil infrastructure were a game changer for the region and specifically the U.S and Saudi. They made it clear that Iran was capable and willing to move their proxy war to inside Saudi with the help of their allies. This shook Saudi Arabia's perception of how strong of a grip it had on the region as Iran's competitor. The bandwagoning strategy followed by the GCC States depended on their alliance flipping the scale of power in their favor. Consequently, when Iran showed that it was not intimidated and would push back, the effectiveness of the alliance in securing their interests was in question. As for the U.S, Iran aimed to send a message that the more pressure the sanctions put, the more Iran will fight back. Iran might not fight the U.S up front but is capable of hitting U.S interests and allies. Iran was putting their tit-for-tat threat into action, and at this point only time would reveal how bad this escalation was going to hurt the region and how long it would last. Therefore, to deescalate the tension in the region the GCC States would need to reconsider building relations with Iran to secure their interests.

Assassination of General Soleimani

With all the tension that was rising in the region during the Gulf crisis, Iran's most powerful military commander, General Qasem Soleimani, was assassinated by the United States in an air strike in Iraq. Soleimani was assassinated on January 3rd 2020, and this was attack also targeted other Iran-backed militia figures (Doucet, 2020). Soleimani was the head of Iran's elite Quds Force and led Iranian military operations in the Middle East. Soleimani strengthened Hezbollah's grip in Lebanon

and other pro-Iranian militant groups. He also succeeded in expanding Iran's military presence in Iraq and Syria. This made his assassination a powerful hit to Iran.

The Pentagon released a statement saying: "At the direction of the president, the U.S military has taken decisive defensive action to protect US personnel abroad by killing Qasem Soleimani. And added: "The United States will continue to take all necessary action to protect our people and our interests wherever they are around the world" (Doucet, 2020). The air strike took place at Baghdad airport and was ordered by Trump. President Trump stated general Soleimani was "directly and indirectly responsible for the deaths of millions of people" (Doucet, 2020). Soleimani's assassination was a major turning point for U.S-Iranian relations and marked dramatic escalation in tensions between the two countries. The drone strike came days after protesters had attacked the U.S embassy in Iraq and clashed with U.S forces at the scene. According to the Pentagon, Soleimani approved the attacks carried out on the embassy. The attack on the U.S embassy in Iraq itself for the U.S was not the real motivation to kill Soleimani, but the fact that Iran, in their opinion, was becoming more and more bold in their attacks on U.S interests in the region.

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's Supreme Leader, commented on the assassination by saying: "Iran and the other free nations of the region will take revenge for this gruesome crime from criminal America". Rouhani added that his death had intensified Iran's determination "to stand against America's bullying"(Doucet, 2020). He continued to say "severe revenge awaits the criminals" that were behind the operation. He also announced there would be three days of national mourning for Soleimani's death (Doucet, 2020). Javad Zarif, Iran's foreign minister, commented saying, "The US' act of international terrorism, targeting & assassinating General Soleimani—THE most effective force fighting Daesh, Al

Nusrah, Al Qaeda et al—is extremely dangerous & a foolish escalation. The US bears responsibility for all consequences of its rogue adventurism” (Doucet, 2020). Ayatollah Khamenei named General Esmail Qaani, deputy head of the Revolutionary Guards' foreign operations arm, to succeed Soleimani.

After the hard hit, Iran could not just take it silently, they had to respond but looked for a way that would not cause a full-out blown war against the U.S. Iran as a country with centuries of experience as a State was fully aware that rushing into a war with the U.S not a good option considering the lack of balance in power. The U.S's military capabilities is far more superior and will have the support of other countries, which are advanced as well, that are willing to back it with what is needed. In a cause that such a war would breakout the best-case scenario would be another Iraq or Afghanistan. Where the U.S with the help of European and other countries would attack Iran with far more powerful capabilities. This would result in chaos after the overthrow of the Iranian regime and the full destruction of the already struggling country. Nevertheless, they held their breath when awaiting Iran's response and what implications could possibly follow.

On the Arab side of the Gulf, the GCC states secretly were relieved by the death of Soleimani, whom they saw as the man behind Iran's destructive proxy war across the Middle East (Dorsey, 2020). However, they feared that his assassination had opened a Pandora's Box to full-out war in the region (Dorsey, 2020). Especially if Iran was blinded by fury and attacked an American military base in the Gulf, which was very unlikely. Such a war would swallow the Gulf region entirely and nowhere would be safe. Not mentioning that trade in the region would constantly be under threat which would affect the global economy. Saudi and the U.A.E called for de-escalation after the assassination and Saudi's deputy defense minister, Khalid bin

Salman, traveled to Washington and urged all parties to show restraint. The killing of Soleimani reinforced once again GCC leader's concerns of their inability to fully rely on the U.S as their sole security guarantor. The GCC States distanced themselves from Washington and focused on bringing down the tension and possibly finding alternative ways to secure the region.

Iran responded to the killing of Soleimani by launching more than a dozen ballistic missiles towards two Iraqi air bases housing U.S. forces on January 8th, 2020 (Kube & Madani, 2020). No U.S soldiers were hurt due to them detecting the threat in advance (Kube & Madani, 2020). Iran said that it was revenge for the assassination of Soleimani, and the U.S kept its reaction minimal by only assuring that there were no casualties. By doing this Iran was able to let its people rest assure that they had avenged their beloved leader ,without starting a war, and the U.S troops and their interest were safe and the countries slowly let the situation deescalate naturally.

The Trump administration's policies increased tension in the Gulf through threatening the security and economies of the GCC States and Iran. Pulling out the nuclear deal, imposing old and new sanctions, as well as assassinating important figures in the Iranian government all shaped threats to Iran's national security. And in return, the threats on Iran's national security would be reflected on the Gulf's security either through attacks on Saudi and Emirati ports through Iran's proxies, or the capturing of oil tankers of U.S allies. This had a very negative impact on the economic interests of the Arab Gulf States as well as their national security.

All this led to a failure in the GCC bandwagoning policy with the U.S and created a situation for the GCC to increase their cooperation with Tehran. Therefore, the independence that Obama was trying to convince the GCC of reaching through the nuclear deal was finally achieved willingly through the GCC's loss of faith in its U.S

ally. The main change was in the GCC States' prospective, that realized that possibly their desire for a U.S president to create a united front in the face of Iran did not bring the needed security. And that being too strict with Iran creates more instability and has a far more negative impact on the security of interests in the region than expected.

CHAPTER 3: GCC-IRAN SHIFT IN RELATIONS

This chapter answers the third and final research question, which was about the type of changes Trump's policies brought to the GCC – Iranian relations. The increasing tension between the U.S and Iran brought instability to the region on many levels, which in return threatened the national security of the countries in the Gulf. The U.S. was busy following Trump's maximum pressure policy with Iran and interested in ways to obtain financial gain from the Gulf States. They therefore seemed to not be focused on securing the region that provided most of the world with energy. Accordingly, the Arab Gulf States stepped in and increased cooperation with Iran to secure their common interest and create a sense of stability in the region. By doing this the GCC States moved toward the balance of threat strategy.

Securing the Gulf

The conflict in the Gulf was increasing and oil tankers in Saudi and Emirati ports were being attacked, threatening international oil trade. The U.S, being an ally of the GCC States, had been protecting commercial interests in the Gulf for almost 40-year; however, Trump reacted to the attacks by saying that the U.S would most likely lessen its role in the Strait of Hormuz because of the U.S. need for Middle Eastern energy is declining (Meredith, 2019). This continued till May of 2019 when four oil tankers were attacked in the Fujairah port in the U.A.E, of which two were Saudi oil tankers (El Gamal & Sharafedin, 2019). At this point the U.A.E decided that it was time to open lines of communication with Iran to secure its maritime routes and economy.

Iran was not on a different page. With the increased pressure from Washington, Tehran was even more eager to resolve the regional tensions as a

necessary ingredient for its domestic and regional stability (Vakil, 2018). Iran's solution to the situation was to create a new regional security framework in the Strait of Hormuz and the Sea of Oman with the participation of the countries of the region. This is why President Hassan Rouhani presented the 'Hormuz Peace Endeavor' (HOPE) during the 74th session of the U.N. General Assembly in September of 2019 (Vaisi, 2020). While Saudi Arabia opposed this proposal, the GCC states with a history of pragmatically dealing with Iran were more willing to facilitate such solution (Vakil, 2018). However, the fractured GCC benefited the region and enabled a new security framework different than Iran's suggestion, but which suits the different parties. This new architecture recognized the concerns of all Gulf states and depended on the bilateral relations between Iran and other GCC States.

Security Cooperation Between U.A.E & Iran

Iran's Tasnim News Agency reported on August 5th 2019 that the UAE signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) regarding co-operation on maritime border security with Iran (The Economist, 2019). Emirati and Iranian security officials held talks and then signed the Memorandum that promoted co-operation on maritime border security.

Leading up to the MoU, the U.S. had been boosting its military presence while, on the other side of the Gulf, Iran was openly proceeding with its nuclear activities and exceeded the limits agreed on back in 2015. The UAE has long supported stricter U.S policies towards Iran including the sanctions (Vahdat & Batrawy, 2019). The UAE had also been an ally to Saudi Arabia in its war in Yemen since 2015 against Iran-aligned rebels. In the weeks leading up to the MoU signing the UAE pulled thousands of its troops from Yemen and sent them back home to boost its national security. The Strait of Hormuz, being a crucial passageway for oil

shipments, witnessed direct and indirect confrontation between the U.S. and Iran causing fears of a wider conflict erupting. This pushed the UAE to call for de-escalation and open diplomacy lines of communication with Iran.

The MoU was a result of efforts on both UAE and Iranian sides to calm tensions amid concerns over threats to the security of oil and gas shipments passing through the Strait of Hormuz. According to the news agencies the UAE and Iranian officials that met in July of 2019 (Vahdat & Batrawy, 2019) were, Iran's Brigadier General Qassem Rezaei, chief of border police, and Brigadier General Mohammed Ali Musleh Al- Ahbabi, UAE coast guard commander. The officials met for the first time in six years (Vahdat & Batrawy, 2019). The UAE's interest was to ensure its economic, security and regional interests. During the talks, the UAE expressed that it does not wish for tensions in the Gulf to escalate into military confrontation. Iranian officials said that this is the first maritime security meeting between both Iran and the UAE officials since 2013. However, reports from the UAE indicated that it was one of a series of meetings.

A softening in the tone of UAE's officials when addressing Iran accompanied the talks. Anwar Gargash, the UAE minister of state for foreign affairs, tweeted on August 2nd, 2019, that the UAE and Saudi Arabia believe in following a political approach with Iran rather than a confrontational one (The Economist, 2019). In addition to the shift in tone, the UAE decided to draw down its troops in Yemen after fighting the Iranian-backed Houthi forces for almost 10 years.

In this way Iran and the U.A.E secured the Strait of Hormuz and achieved national and economical security in the area. It also improved communication and strengthened diplomatic ties between the two countries. The U.A.E had been a clear ally to Saudi Arabia in many regional cases such as the War on Yemen and the

blockade against Qatar. However, the step to secure the Strait of Hormuz was done independently and is possibly part of the future split in their alliance. The U.A.E might have had the best economic ties with Iran but countries such as Kuwait and Oman have better diplomatic relations with it. Oman is known for its mediation efforts between the U.S and Iran, and after the blockade, Qatar joined Oman in its efforts during the crisis in an attempt to decrease tensions through communication and avoid escalation.

Oman & Qatar Mediation Effort Between U.S & Iran

The Arab Gulf Arab state of Oman maintains friendly relations with both the United States and Iran. Oman served as an important go-between for the two countries in 1980 when Iran took American hostages, and it also took a neutral stance in the dispute regarding the Iranian nuclear program. Oman is one of leading States when it comes to mediation between Tehran and Washington, and one of the most successful outcomes of Oman's facilitating effort was the JCPOA. During the nuclear negotiations Oman acted as a facilitator for the nuclear deal but did not play a role in the negotiations. Some experts argue that the Omani approach to disputes which focuses on specific and manageable issues and not the grand bargain, offers lessons and should be applied on a wider scale across the region (Ulrichsen, 2020).

Qatar on the other hand, became one of the world's most active mediators on regional and intranational levels since the mid-2000 (Kamrava, 2011). Some of its most notable of mediation efforts were in Sudan, Lebanon, and Yemen. Qatar has created an image for itself through its efforts as an honest broker that is interested in peace and stability (Kamrava, 2011). Qatar might have been known on an

International level for its mediation, but when it came to Iran, Qatar had stronger relations with Saudi Arabia.

However, after the blockade and the improvement in the Qatari- Iranian relations, Qatar stepped up during the escalation of event in the Gulf. On January 12th, 2020, Qatar's Emir travelled to Tehran to meet the Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, meanwhile Mohammad Javad Zarif, the Iranian Foreign Minister, met with Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Sultan of Oman, in Muscat (Ulrichsen, 2020). Bin Alawi, the Omani Minister of Foreign Affairs, had participated in a Forum earlier that month on the 7th of January in Tehran. On the other hand, Zarif took part in the Doha Forum in Qatar in December 2019. Opportunities such as these present opportunities to keep indirect channels of communication open between Iran and the U.S. Keeping indirect channels of communication open makes it possible to minimize or possibly prevent misunderstanding or a miscalculation that could lead to conflicts (Ulrichsen, 2020).

Qatar's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani, said while discussing Doha's mediation efforts to de-escalate the tension in the Gulf region that Qatar has ties with the U.S and Iran, and that it had had opened lines of communication with Washington and Tehran in an attempt to de-escalate the situation in the region (England, 2019). The talks came after weeks of escalated tensions and raising fears of a new conflict breaking out in the region. Al Thani said: "Right now, I believe it's like a stalemate. What we are concerned about is any miscalculation by any of the parties, either direct or indirect parties... Any dispute should end with a settlement: settlement means compromises by both parties and we hope this happens sooner rather than later because the longer it takes, the more tension it creates in the region and will lead to more and more

problems and conflicts” (England, 2019). Then he went to explain that Doha had been attempting to “bridge the gap” and create an open line of communication between the U.S and Iran (England, 2019). Al Thani also expressed Qatar’s great respect for the US’ policy but then added: “we have our own assessment” (England, 2019). Al Thani explained Iran’s situation and said: “There is a big pressure on Iran’s economy, but Iran lived under sanctions for 40 years. It’s never been like this, but they survived. We don’t see the repetition of the same way will create a different result”. Then he continued to say: “They [Iran] don’t want to have a continuation of the sanctions at the same level and enter negotiations [with the US]. They believe there was an agreement and US was part of the agreement” (England, 2019). Shaikh Mohammed’s words make it clear that Qatar is taking a moderate approach when dealing with Iran than it did previously. This could possibly help gain Iran’s trust and increase chances of reaching a resolution between Iran and the U.S.

In 2017 or 2018 diplomacy with Iran might have been hard, but in 2020 chances became higher for the leaders Saudi and the UAE to engage in dialogue following the escalations in 2019. The MOU that the UAE signed with Iran is an example of the open dialogue that was induced by the events. However, with all the work that the GCC States were doing to improve their relationship with Iran and open communication between Washington and Tehran, the GCC States did not forget to keep their relations with the U.S good as well by speaking President Trump’s language of Money. The GCC States increased their purchase of weapons in the years that Trump was in office.

Iranian Pilgrims Allowed Back to Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia being a dominant power on the Gulf, also considers itself representative of Sunni Muslims in the world. Therefore, it is in constant competition,

as previously mentioned, with Iran, another dominant power in the region and a representative of Shiite Muslims in the world. This challenge in ideology sparked a conflict between the two states back in 2016, when Saudi Arabia executed the Shiite religious figure Nimr Al-Nimr, along with 47 people on death row. The string of charges that Nimr was accused of included sowing dissent and stirring violent anti-government protests in the predominantly Shiite east. His family denied saying that Sheikh Al-Nimr never promoted violence or picked up a weapon (Vahdat, 2016). Sheikh al-Nimr's execution sparked widespread protests in Shiite-led Iran, especially considering that Iran views itself the protector of Shiites around the world (Vahdat, 2016). This resulted in demonstrations breaking out outside of Saudi diplomatic posts in Tehran and Mashhad turning violent. The protesters stormed the Saudi embassy in Tehran and its consulate in Mashhad. Riyadh responded attacks by cutting diplomatic relations with Tehran (الجزيرة، 2017).

Moreover, the disaster that occurred during the previous hajj season resulted in the killing of at least 2,426 people of which 464 of the killed pilgrims were from Iran (Vahdat, 2016). Iran said that the stampede in the area of Mina was a result of Saudi “incompetence” (Vahdat, 2016). This all led to Iran announcing that it would not be sending its pilgrims to Saudi Arabia that year- 2015- for the annual hajj. This was a sign of the tensions between the two Middle Eastern powers. The state-run IRNA news agency reported statements of Iran's minister of culture and Islamic guidance. Ali Jannati, said that negotiations were held between Iran and Saudi Arabia in hopes of resolving the issue of security during hajj, but that they had failed to reach resolution (Vahdat, 2016). Jannati added: “We did whatever we could, but it was the Saudis who sabotaged it... Now the time is lost” (Vahdat, 2016). Jannati also explained that: “In the absence of an Iranian consular office in Saudi Arabia following

the severance of ties between Tehran and Riyadh, Iran's proposals regarding visa application, air transport and security of pilgrims were not accepted by the Saudi officials” (Vahdat, 2016).

However, in February of 2017, Iran sent a delegation to Saudi Arabia to initiate the process of Iranian pilgrims returning for hajj. Saudi authorities assured that hajj would be safe but asked Iranians to not to hold their traditional Shi'ite prayer in Medina's open space out of fear of a potential ISIS attack. Mahdi Hadibeh, an Iranian photographer in Mecca, said: “I think that is reasonable” and that: “Iranians are holding the ceremonies separately in their hotels”.

Saudi might have come to a resolution with Iran but in the same year cut ties with Qatar. It was surprising that Saudi would partially workout its problems with its rival but would not make it easy for Qatari pilgrims considering that Qatar has always backed and supported Saudi and one of the GCC States. It was as if Saudi was making a statement saying that they trust Iran more than Qatar in order to pressure Qatar. Iran on the other hand took advantage of the situation and saw it as an opportunity to improve its relationship with Qatar and gain economically. This played into Iran's understanding of the importance of working on its bilateral relations with every GCC State in order to gain their trust and capitalize on it. This means that any loss of a GCC State for Saudi would be a gain to Iran and with time could lead to a change in the balance of power in the region to Iran's benefit.

Iran Helps Qatar with Blockade Challenges

Instead of dealing with the GCC as a bloc, Tehran, over the years, pursued bilateral relations with Oman, Kuwait, Qatar, and the UAE. By following this strategy, Iran and has been able to capitalize on the internal tensions of GCC States.

This was which have escalated since the 2017 Qatar crisis (Vakil, 2018). These ties have enabled Tehran to protect itself from past US-led isolation and containment efforts, but have not graduated beyond reactionary, pragmatic engagement.

Other than Qatar and Iran being neighbors that are across from each other in the Gulf, Qatar and Iran also share the world's largest gas field. Therefore, it has always been important to keep peaceful relations between the two nations, but at the same time they did not have the strongest of relations in the Gulf.

Qatar was suffering from food shortages after the 2017 blockade, because 40% of Qatar's food used to come through its land border with Saudi Arabia (Cafiero & Paraskevopoulos, 2019). This is when Iran sent Qatar five plane loads of food (Cafiero & Paraskevopoulos, 2019). Shahrokh Noushabadi, a spokesman for Iran Air, told the Agence France-Presse news agency: "So far five planes carrying perishable food items such as fruit and vegetables have been sent to Qatar, each carrying around 90 tons of cargo, while another plane will be sent today" (Cafiero & Paraskevopoulos, 2019). Noushabadi also added that the deliveries would continue "as long as there is demand" (Cafiero & Paraskevopoulos, 2019). The Tasnim news agency quoted the AFP and reported that three ships carrying 350 tons of food were sent to Qatar.

Food was not the only thing that Iran provided to Qatar; Iran also opened its airspace to Qatari flights after the blockading countries-imposed airspace closures. Flights performed by Qatari airlines were given permission to pass through Iranian airspace while traveling to Africa and Europe (Cafiero & Paraskevopoulos, 2019). Previously, Qatari flights with destinations in North and Central Europe and the North Atlantic passed through the skies of Kuwait, Iraq, Bahrain, and Turkey. However, after the blockade, Qatari flights only needed to cross from Iranian to Turkish airspaces before arriving in Europe, as explained by Iranian officials (Tehran Times,

2017). Tasnim news agency quoted Rahmatollah Mahabadi, the chairman of the board and managing director of Iran Airports Company (IAC): “About 100-150 flights have been added to Iran’s daily air traffic” (Tehran Times, 2017). However, Mehr news agency quoted an IAC official saying that before the blockade 955 foreign flights would pass through Iran’s airspace per day, and that if Qatar airlines decided to take the Iranian route, the figure would likely rise by 200 flights (Tehran Times, 2017).

Qatar’s relations with Iran might have not been as strengthened as expected, but it did bring Qatar into the realm of mediation between Iran and the U.S and also brought economic gain and benefit to both countries. The improvement in Iran’s relationship with Qatar and the MOU signed with the U.A.E would teach the GCC States the importance of collaborating with Iran for regional security. The improvement in the bilateral relations between Iran and Qatar, as well as Iran and the U.A.E would also play in Iran’s favor during the Covid19 crisis.

Qatar & U.A.E Help Iran During Coronavirus

As if U.S sanctions were not hitting Iran hard enough Covid19 came into the picture and made things worse. Iran’s first official cases were announced on February 19th, 2020, and things went downhill from that point on (Rafiei & Sridhar, 2020). An Iranian senior health official, Alireza Zali, warned that the virus was nowhere near containment, especially in Tehran province, which witnessed the highest number of deaths in the country (Shahla & Motevalli, 2020). The semi-official news agency Mehr reported the coronavirus was “expanding” in the capital Tehran itself.

Iran was struggling to fight the epidemic, so Iranian Officials repeatedly called on the US to ease the sanctions. Abbas Mousavi called upon the US to unfreeze millions of Iranian dollars that are overseas and blocked by the U.S sanctions so that

the Iranian government can use them to buy humanitarian supplies (Shahla & Motevalli, 2020). However, the U.S did not respond, and Tehran was forced to seek a \$5 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Shahla & Motevalli, 2020). The U.S might argue that the sanctions exclude humanitarian supplies, but Iranian experts such as the Iranian political analyst at the University of Tehran, Mohammad Marandi, argue that the sanctions make such purchases difficult and companies would rather not cooperate with Iran (Al Jazeera, 2020). Luckily for Iran the U.A.E and Qatar stepped in to help fight back the crisis.

Iran was the Middle East's epicenter for coronavirus and the UAE was one of the first countries to help the Iranian government with the outbreak and send humanitarian aid shipments across the Gulf. The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman, Abbas Mousavi, said that "reason and logic" was brought into the relationship between the United Arab Emirates and Iran due to the spread of coronavirus in the region (Shahla & Motevalli, 2020).

The ties between Iran and the UAE had significantly deteriorated after President Trump withdrew from the nuclear deal in 2018 because the UAE is a close ally of Saudi Arabia and the U.S (Shahla & Motevalli, 2020). However, after the MOU that was signed in 2019 might have helped improve the diplomatic ties and increased cooperation.

Another neighboring nation that stepped in to provide humanitarian help was Qatar. Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, the Amir of Qatar, gave orders to support Iran in its fight against coronavirus (Covid-19). The Qatari Fund for Development (QFFD) carried out the orders and sent Iran a shipment of additional medical aid (Gulf Times, 2020). Qatar Airways delivered a shipment which weighed around 15 tons. The shipment included basic medical equipment and supplies. Qatar Airways

tweeted saying: "During this difficult time, it is our shared responsibility to support the Iranian people and we will do our part by providing aircraft free of charge to transport donated medical supplies from around the world" (Shoeb, 2020). Qatar sent a second shipment of 13 tons to Iran in order to cover the shortage in medical supplies that were needed to combat Covid-19 (Gulf Times, 2020). The fourth time Qatar sent 16 tons of medical supplies (Ibicioglu, Bitmez & Topcu, 2020).

The QFFD stated that the shipment came as a part of Qatar's framework and continuous efforts to provide urgent medical aid through air bridges, to countries suffering from the wide spread of Covid-19 (Gulf Times, 2020). Khalifa Al-Kuwari, Director General of QFFD, said that assisting the Islamic Republic of Iran is a reflection of Qatar's active role in supporting friendly and brotherly countries. He continued saying that by helping these States overcome this crisis and fight back the pandemic will help fight back threats that have an impact on the entire world (Gulf Times, 2020). Maysam Bizaer, An Iranian social media activist, praised Qatar for helping Iran and tweeted: "When Qatar was under the blockade by Saudi Arabia and UAE, Iran was among first countries to assist it by sending all needed goods. Now as Iran is amid Covid-19 Qatar Airways has pledged to carry all medical donations to Iran free, prompting praise & gratitude from Iranians. Thank you" (Shoeb, 2020).

This was a good and productive way to appease Iran. The U.A.E and Qatar's actions during the pandemic revealed the lesson that was learned during the Gulf crisis which was the importance of cooperation between the GCC and Iran in overcoming regional threats and achieving regional security.

Overall, main changes that came to the GCC-Iran relations included an increase in cooperation. The Gulf States were able to overcome challenges and obtain national security through economic, religious, and military levels through cooperation

with Iran. They have also made significant efforts in opening lines of communication with Iran which is key in keeping stability in the region and stopping conflicts before they start. Also, keeping communication flowing can help in bringing Iran and U.S closer to understanding and further away from conflict. It is noticeable that the Gulf States and Iran were able to overcome many of the threats facing their region through recognizing every threat separately and work together on neutralizing the certain threat. Over time following such strategy of recognizing mutual threats and overcoming them through cooperation could possibly result in stronger relations and more open communication due to the realization that only they will suffer if the region goes into chaos. And in doing this the GCC States moved away from focusing on their adopting the bandwagoning strategy and the traditional power balancing, and closer to creating alliances with Iran based on their common interests like that in Stephen Walt's theory of balance of threat.

CONCLUSION

Obama's nuclear deal was an attempt to bring stability and make peace with Iran. However, most Gulf States seemed to not have a very positive attitude about the deal. Regardless of the political attitude, the GCC and Iranian economies, with the exception of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, benefited from the lifting of the sanctions. However, the GCC States still hung on to their bandwagoning policy that they adopted during the second Gulf war, where they depended on the U.S for protection. Trump soon came to office and the sanctions were reimposed and trade with Iran was cut back once again. Trump coming into office brought many unexpected changes that only Iran seemed to have been prepared for. The policies put out by the Trump administration led to an increase in tension in the Gulf region which threatened the security and economies of both Iran and the Gulf States.

Even though the GCC States strategies have been discussed as a whole, it is important to point out that in the thesis the interactions between every GCC State and Iran were different and unique. Starting with Saudi Arabia, it has been in constant competition and in a power struggle kept their interactions with Iran limited and the only obvious change was letting the Iranian pilgrims into Saudi. Even with the Houthi attacks on Abqaiq and Khurais Oil infrastructure Saudi still did not strive to cooperate with Iran as much as it could, because of its history of competition and depending on the U.S for protection. The kingdom of Bahrain followed Saudi especially considering the constant threat that Bahrain feels from Iran due to it having a Shia population and depends on Saudi Arabia for protection.

As for the UAE, from what has been mentioned it is evident that it prioritizes its economic stability. As a result of this prioritizing when its economic interests were threatened it initiated cooperation with Iran to secure them. The UAE even with

its disputes with Iran over its Islands, yet it keeps its relations with Iran as stable as possible and has the largest trade with it among all the GCC States. Qatar on the other hand, is a State that prioritizes its peace and stability. It shares its north gas field with Iran and has no major disputes with Iran. However, it being part of the GCC, for the longest time sided with its bigger sister State of Saudi when it came to regional disputes. Qatar is a well-known mediator in the region and keeps good relations with everyone. As a result, Qatar has always kept good relations with Iran due to the common gas field and to avoid conflict even if it did not agree with its policies. This is why when Qatar was blockaded it had no problem accepting assistance from Iran and when the Covid19 pandemic hit Iran bad it repaid the favor. To Qatar the priority is to keep its peace as well as the region's and it will open lines of cooperation with it even if they do not see eye-to-eye for the sake of keeping the peace.

Oman is a GCC State that does not get involved in disputes in region and has one of the best relations with Iran and like Qatar is values its peace. Oman had helped with the mediation when Obama was negotiating the nuclear deal. Therefore, when the tension increased it stepped forward to help deescalate. And finally, there is Kuwait who unlike other GCC States found itself in the middle of regional disputes and power struggles, especially ones in playing out on Iraqi due to its direct shared borders. Kuwait also for a good period of time found itself at one point in history having a common enemy with Iran which was Iraq. Iraq attempted to invade Iran in the first Gulf war then invaded Kuwait in the second. In addition, Kuwait has a good size Shiite population that would for religious if not other reasons visit Iran. This means that Iran could shape a threat to Kuwait and therefore it is important to maintain friendly relations with Iran regardless of any differences.

Amongst the GCC States, the Abraham Accords (2020) was only signed by the U.A.E and Bahrain. Therefore, arguing that the GCC States created new alliances to push back the Iranian threat might be limited to those two States. However, after years of not trusting Iran, it would be understandable that a few of the Gulf States would look for alternative allies for protection. Choosing Israel as an ally, which shares the same worries as the GCC States towards Iran, is reasonable ally for them - even if their people were not accepting of such alliances. But as previously mentioned only two of the GCC States joined the Accords which makes this paper's argument a stronger one due to all GCC States being included a type of cooperation or mediation work with Iran

Decisions made by the Trump administration such as pulling out of the nuclear deal and reimposing sanctions, in addition to the assassination of important Iranian government figures, were all threats to Iran's national security. The threats to Iran's national security also affected the security of the States in the Gulf altogether, GCC States included. The attacks on Saudi and Emirati ports with the help of Iran's proxies, and the capturing of U.S ally oil tankers were all shapes of instability caused by the tension. Therefore, the negative impact of U.S- Iranian conflicts had a negative and damaging impact on the Arab Gulf States' interests, economies, and national security. This all was the failure of the GCC's bandwagoning policy with the U.S and pushed them away from their dependence on the U.S as their sole protector.

Since State security was at risk, and the bandwagoning strategy was failing to secure their interests the GCC adopted a balance of threat strategy with Iran. The Gulf States made changes to their interactions with Iran in order to overcome the challenges and obtain national security through cooperation on economic, religious, and military levels. They have also made significant efforts in opening lines of

communication with Iran which was essential in maintaining stability in the region in an attempt stop conflicts before they started. Keeping lines of communication open can help in bringing Iran and the U.S closer to understanding and away from conflict. By following such strategies, the Gulf States and Iran successfully overcame many of the threats that they faced. This was achieved by recognizing and working together on neutralizing threats by finding solutions that suit both parties. As time passes and the continuation of following such strategies where mutual threats are recognized and overcome through cooperation, it is very possible that it could result in stronger relations and more effective communication. Opening lines of communication and cooperation has been something that Iran was calling for and predicted that its absence would lead to bigger problems. This could be a result of Iran having more experience in being a modern state compared with the GCC States that are relatively new to the concept. It is important that the Gulf countries recognize that they are the ones that will suffer if the region were to fall into chaos, and that communication and cooperation is the only way to come to keep up stability.

This all plays into the thesis's main hypothesis which was that Trump's policies regarding the Gulf region brought the GCC and Iran closer together to securitize their mutual interests. This is also inline with the thesis's main theory of balance of threat advocated for by Walt (1987) that argued that alliances between States to secure their common interests of States is prioritized over other motivations. The GCC States and Iran were unable and willing to cooperate in the past, and secured their interests through creating allies with other countries, such as the GCC's alliance with the U.S. However, when the GCC states felt threatened, and the U.S was no longer a safe ally, they were willing to cooperate with Iran regardless of their past rivalry, disagreements, and differences.

Donald Trump left office in February of 2021 after Joe Biden won the 2020 U.S elections and many people speculated that Biden would mean a third Obama term. However, Biden soon refused such speculations, and in a sense, proved them incorrect considering his entering office was not followed by going back to the previous nuclear deal. President Biden attempted to bring Iran to the negotiation table before lifting any sanctions, which is just a more subtle approach to Trump's target. It is important for the future of the region that the three main players in the region learn from their previous experiences. The main two lessons include: that the U.S will not be very successful in persuading Iran by using strict tones, and that it is important for the GCC States to become more active in cooperation and communication with Iran in matters that concern the security of their states. When dealing with this rapidly changing region it is important to put effort into communication and cooperation in order to reach the most favorable outcomes possible, guaranteeing stability and security in the Gulf region and possibly replicating it to the rest of the Middle East.

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APPENDIX

Iran exports to United Arab Emirates	Value	Year
Mineral fuels, oils, distillation products	\$3.77B	2018
Organic chemicals	\$803.71M	2018
Iron and steel	\$419.61M	2018
Copper	\$237.35M	2018
Edible fruits, nuts, peel of citrus fruit, melons	\$185.49M	2018
Coffee, tea, mate and spices	\$105.34M	2018
Edible vegetables and certain roots and tubers	\$92.97M	2018
Salt, sulphur, earth, stone, plaster, lime and cement	\$60.07M	2018
Machinery, nuclear reactors, boilers	\$40.06M	2018
Carpets and other textile floor coverings	\$36.42M	2018

Table 1: Iranian exports to the United Arab Emirates. From: tradingeconomics.com

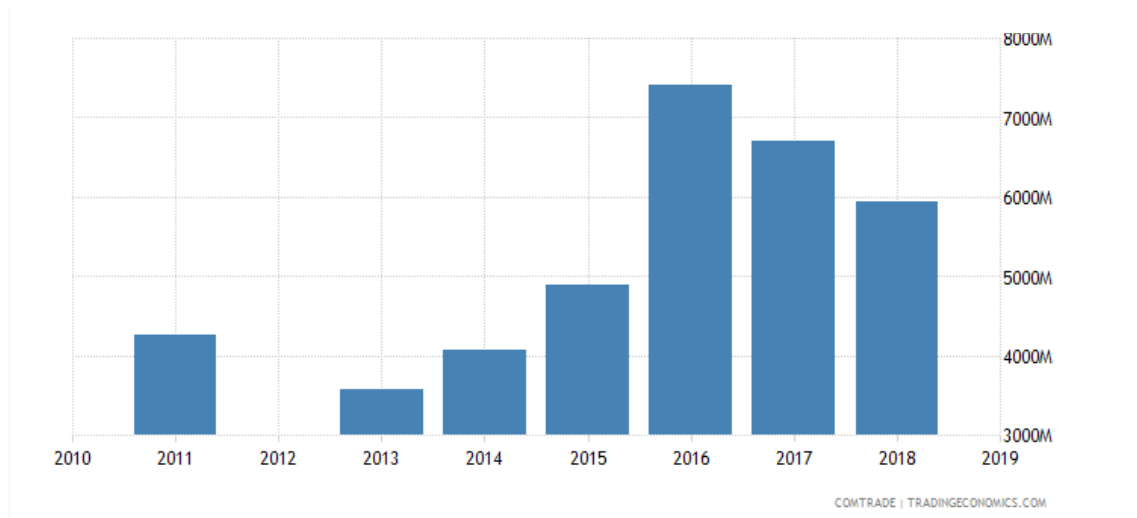


Figure 1: Iranian exports to the United Arab Emirates. From: tradingeconomics.com

United Arab Emirates exports to Iran	Value	Year
Electrical, electronic equipment	\$2.10B	2018
Machinery, nuclear reactors, boilers	\$2.06B	2018
Vehicles other than railway, tramway	\$1.79B	2018
Tobacco and manufactures tobacco substitutes	\$429.85M	2018
Manmade filaments	\$411.45M	2018
Rubbers	\$385.33M	2018
Edible fruits, nuts, peel of citrus fruit, melons	\$285.10M	2018
Cereals	\$216.93M	2018
Essential oils, perfumes, cosmetics, toileteries	\$201.72M	2018
Pearls, precious stones, metals, coins	\$162.29M	2018

Table 2: United Arab Emirates Exports to Iran. From: tradingeconomics.com

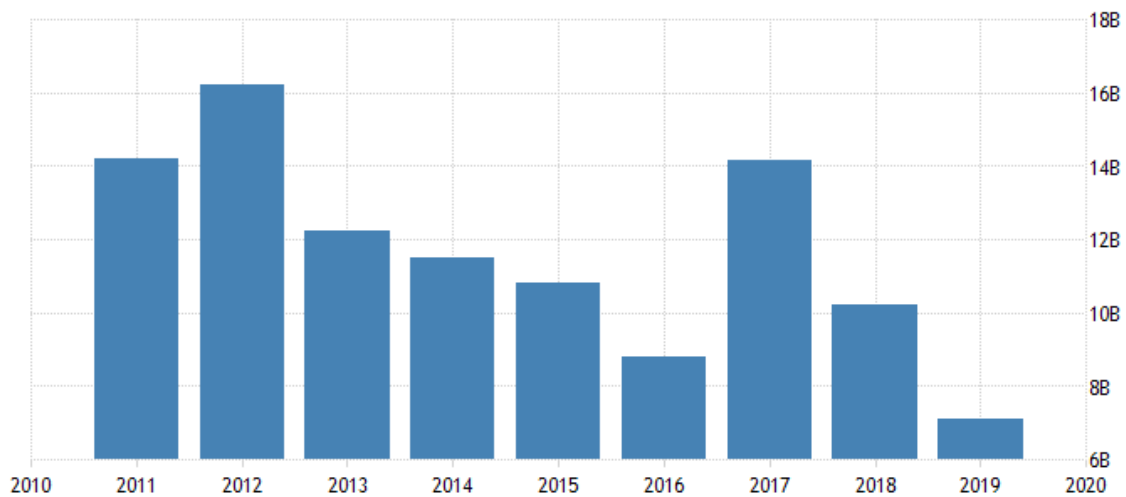


Figure 2: United Arab Emirates Exports to Iran. From: tradingeconomics.com

Qatar exports to Iran	Value	Year
Machinery, nuclear reactors, boilers	\$1.72M	2019
Inorganic chemicals, precious metal compound, isotope	\$1.27M	2019
Mineral fuels, oils, distillation products	\$418.36K	2019
Live animals	\$259.62K	2019
Vehicles other than railway, tramway	\$254.95K	2019
Plastics	\$196.96K	2019
Optical, photo, technical, medical apparatus	\$175.01K	2019
Carpets and other textile floor coverings	\$148.31K	2019
Edible vegetables and certain roots and tubers	\$124.1K	2019
Paper and paperboard, articles of pulp, paper and board	\$109.89K	2019

Table 3: Qatari export to Iran. From: tradingeconomics.com

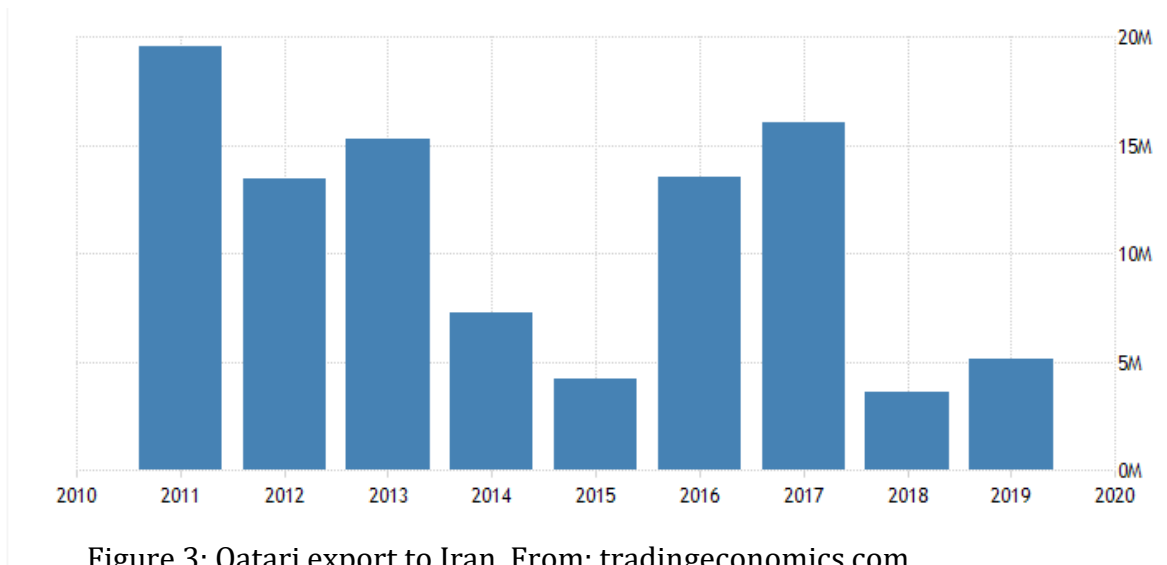


Figure 3: Qatari export to Iran. From: tradingeconomics.com

Iran exports to Qatar	Value	Year
Mineral fuels, oils, distillation products	\$41.21M	2018
Edible vegetables and certain roots and tubers	\$31.45M	2018
Iron and steel	\$30.88M	2018
Salt, sulphur, earth, stone, plaster, lime and cement	\$17.24M	2018
Carpets and other textile floor coverings	\$17.00M	2018
Edible fruits, nuts, peel of citrus fruit, melons	\$15.55M	2018
Stone, plaster, cement, asbestos, mica or similar materials	\$7.89M	2018
Articles of iron or steel	\$7.85M	2018
Live animals	\$6.44M	2018
Plastics	\$6.26M	2018

Table 4: Iranian Exports to Qatar. From: tradingeconomics.com

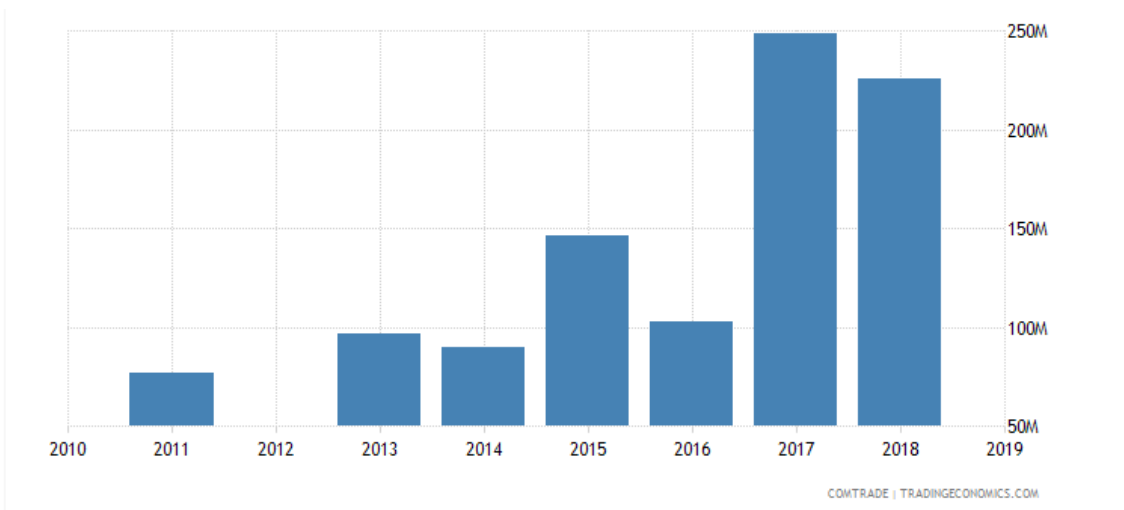


Figure 4: Iranian Exports to Qatar. From: tradingeconomics.com

Oman exports to Iran	Value	Year
Tobacco and manufactures tobacco substitutes	\$358.52M	2018
Electrical, electronic equipment	\$22.53M	2018
Machinery, nuclear reactors, boilers	\$10.94M	2018
Vehicles other than railway, tramway	\$3.44M	2018
Clocks and watches	\$2.37M	2018
Meat and edible meat offal	\$2.15M	2018
Animal, vegetable fats and oils, cleavage products	\$1.87M	2018
Vegetable, fruit, nut food preparations	\$1.85M	2018
Aluminum	\$1.78M	2018
Optical, photo, technical, medical apparatus	\$1.72M	2018

Table 5: Omani exports to Iran. From: tradingeconomics.com

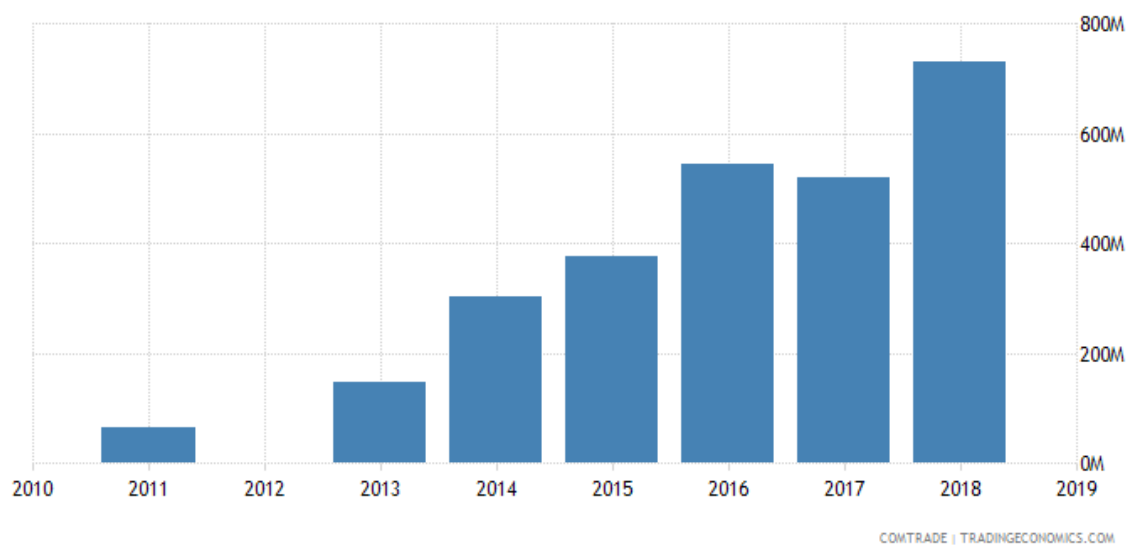


Figure 5: Omani exports to Iran. From: tradingeconomics.com

Iran exports to Oman	Value	Year
Iron and steel	\$271.83M	2018
Mineral fuels, oils, distillation products	\$261.77M	2018
Organic chemicals	\$68.97M	2018
Live animals	\$20.57M	2018
Edible fruits, nuts, peel of citrus fruit, melons	\$17.32M	2018
Salt, sulphur, earth, stone, plaster, lime and cement	\$15.79M	2018
Edible vegetables and certain roots and tubers	\$14.76M	2018
Cereals	\$9.44M	2018
Carpets and other textile floor coverings	\$4.76M	2018
Zinc	\$4.55M	2018

Table 6: Iranian exports to Oman. From: tradingeconomics.com

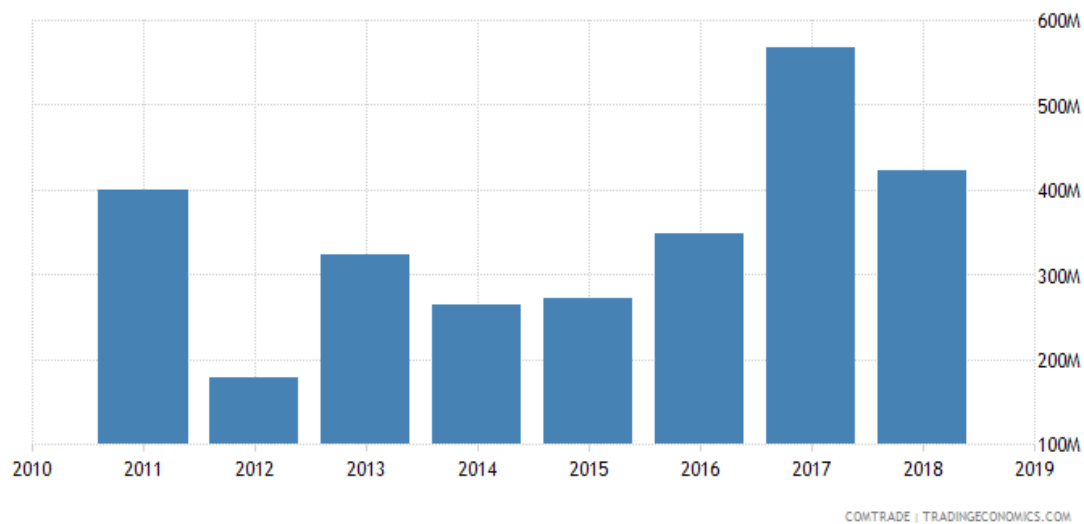


Figure 6: Iranian exports to Oman. From: tradingeconomics.com

Iran exports to Saudi Arabia	Value	Year
Vehicles other than railway, tramway	\$108.00K	2018
Carpets and other textile floor coverings	\$1.07K	2018
Optical, photo, technical, medical apparatus	\$200K	2017
Mineral fuels, oils, distillation products	\$75.59K	2017
Glass and glassware	\$39.54K	2016
Ceramic products	\$6.48K	2016
Edible fruits, nuts, peel of citrus fruit, melons	\$4.38K	2016
Printed books, newspapers, pictures	\$3.6K	2016
Iron and steel	\$86.06M	2015
Coffee, tea, mate and spices	\$9.79M	2015

Table 7: Iranian exports to Saudi Arabia. From: tradingeconomics.com

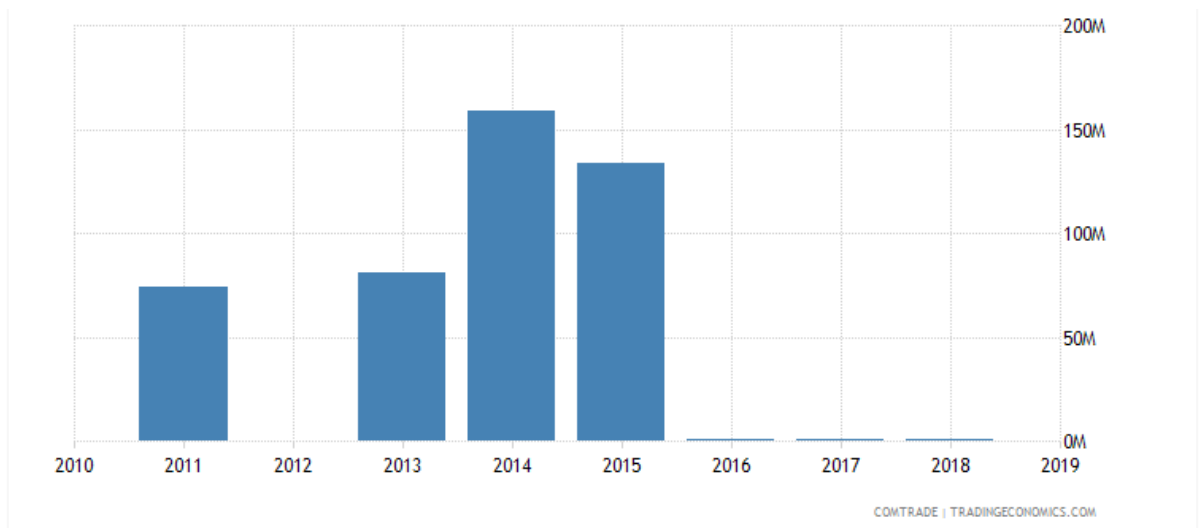


Figure 7: Iranian exports to Saudi Arabia. From: tradingeconomics.com

Saudi Arabia exports to Iran	Value	Year
Machinery, nuclear reactors, boilers	\$575.80K	2016
Plastics	\$38.47M	2015
Paper and paperboard, articles of pulp, paper and board	\$27.33M	2015
Miscellaneous articles of base metal	\$20.49M	2015
Aluminum	\$11.05M	2015
Articles of iron or steel	\$4.63M	2015
Wadding, felt, nonwovens, yarns, twine, cordage	\$4.21M	2015
Vehicles other than railway, tramway	\$4.03M	2015
Tanning, dyeing extracts, tannins, derivatives, pigments	\$3.65M	2015
Miscellaneous chemical products	\$2.23M	2015

Table 8: Saudi Arabian exports to Iran. From: tradingeconomics.com

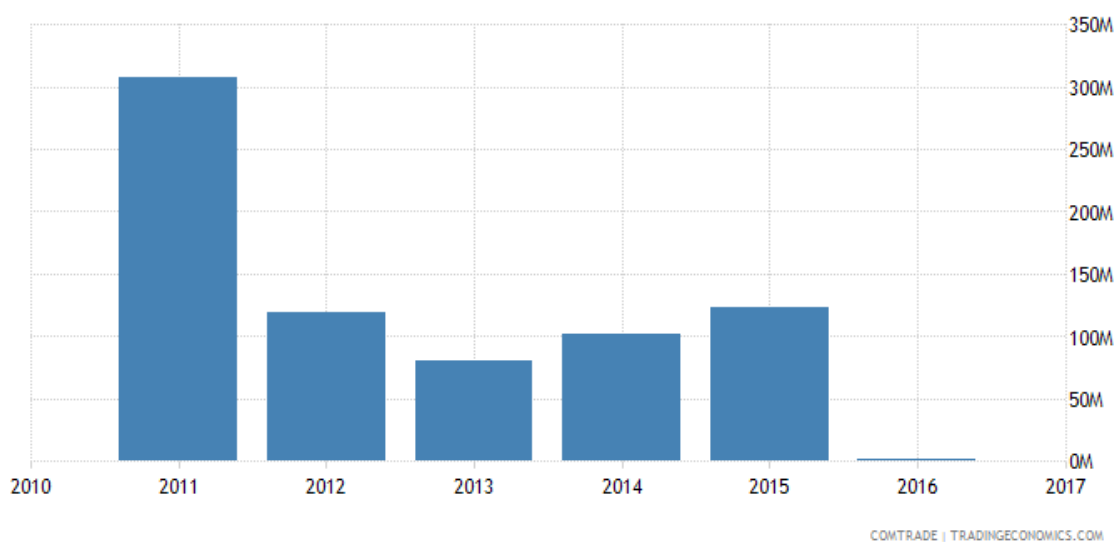


Figure 2: Saudi Arabian exports to Iran. From: tradingeconomics.com

Iran exports to Kuwait	Value	Year
Salt, sulphur, earth, stone, plaster, lime and cement	\$89.60M	2018
Residues, wastes of food industry, animal fodder	\$28.69M	2018
Fish, crustaceans, molluscs, aquatics invertebrates	\$26.38M	2018
Iron and steel	\$24.40M	2018
Edible fruits, nuts, peel of citrus fruit, melons	\$17.37M	2018
Oil seed, oleagic fruits, grain, seed, fruits	\$9.48M	2018
Edible vegetables and certain roots and tubers	\$8.65M	2018
Carpets and other textile floor coverings	\$8.48M	2018
Live animals	\$6.28M	2018
Stone, plaster, cement, asbestos, mica or similar materials	\$5.31M	2018

Table 9: Iranian exports to Kuwait. From: tradingeconomics.com

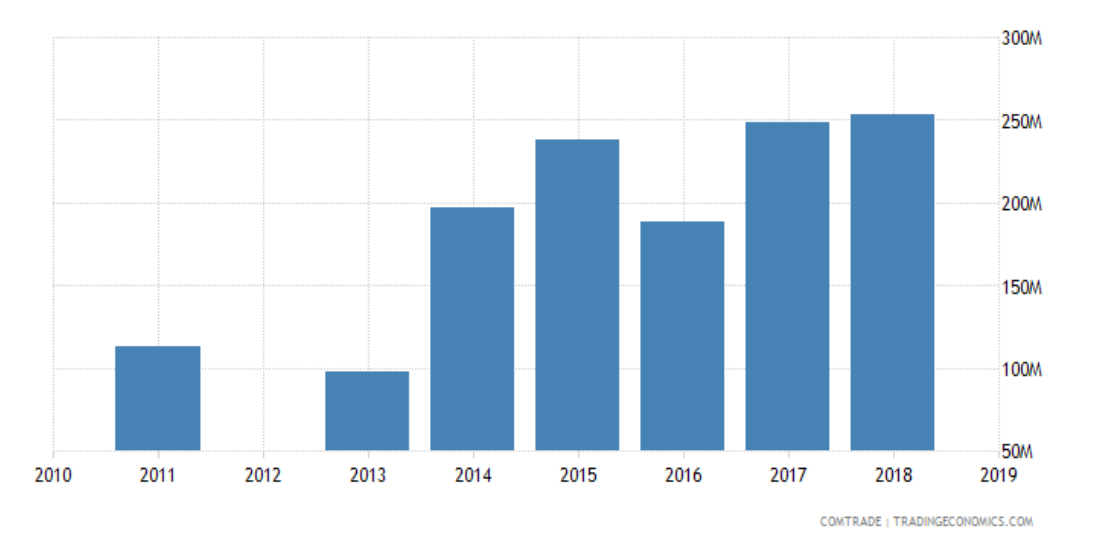


Figure 9: Iranian exports to Kuwait. From: tradingeconomics.com

Kuwait exports to Iran	Value	Year
Vehicles other than railway, tramway	\$32.24M	2018
Machinery, nuclear reactors, boilers	\$8.43M	2018
Vegetable, fruit, nut food preparations	\$6.12M	2018
Electrical, electronic equipment	\$2.18M	2018
Beverages, spirits and vinegar	\$2.02M	2018
Animal, vegetable fats and oils, cleavage products	\$1.95M	2018
Coffee, tea, mate and spices	\$1.85M	2018
Dairy products, eggs, honey, edible products	\$1.51M	2018
Ceramic products	\$857.55K	2018
Soaps, lubricants, waxes, candles, modelling pastes	\$804.40K	2018

Table 10: Kuwaiti exports to Iran. From: tradingeconomics.com

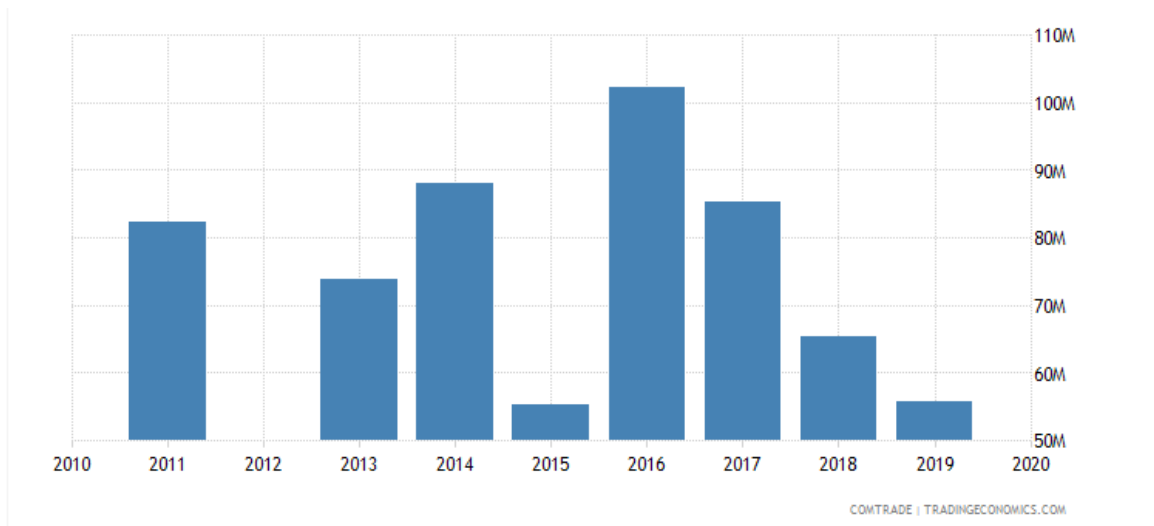


Figure 3: Kuwaiti exports to Iran. From: tradingeconomics.com

Iran exports to Kuwait	Value	Year
Salt, sulphur, earth, stone, plaster, lime and cement	\$89.60M	2018
Residues, wastes of food industry, animal fodder	\$28.69M	2018
Fish, crustaceans, molluscs, aquatics invertebrates	\$26.38M	2018
Iron and steel	\$24.40M	2018
Edible fruits, nuts, peel of citrus fruit, melons	\$17.37M	2018
Oil seed, oleagic fruits, grain, seed, fruits	\$9.48M	2018
Edible vegetables and certain roots and tubers	\$8.65M	2018
Carpets and other textile floor coverings	\$8.48M	2018
Live animals	\$6.28M	2018
Stone, plaster, cement, asbestos, mica or similar materials	\$5.31M	2018

Table 11: Iranian exports to Kuwait. From: tradingeconomics.com

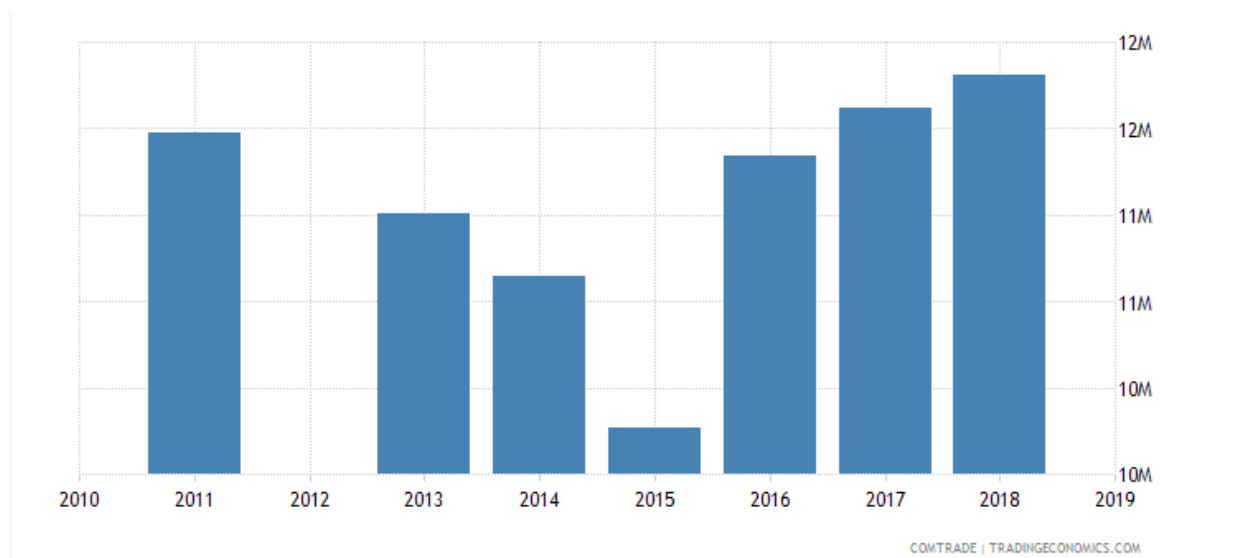


Figure 11: Iranian exports to Kuwait. From: tradingeconomics.com

Bahrain exports to Iran	Value	Year
Aluminum	\$303.11K	2018
Miscellaneous chemical products	\$281.15K	2018
Rubbers	\$203.26K	2018
Coffee, tea, mate and spices	\$30.80K	2018
Milling products, malt, starches, inlin, wheat gluten	\$5.10K	2018
Machinery, nuclear reactors, boilers	\$199.47K	2017
Plastics	\$97.05K	2017
Articles of iron or steel	\$63.90K	2017
Tanning, dyeing extracts, tannins, derivatives, pigments	\$36.58K	2017
Essential oils, perfumes, cosmetics, toileteries	\$20.19K	2017

Table 12: Bahraini exports to Iran. From: tradingeconomics.com

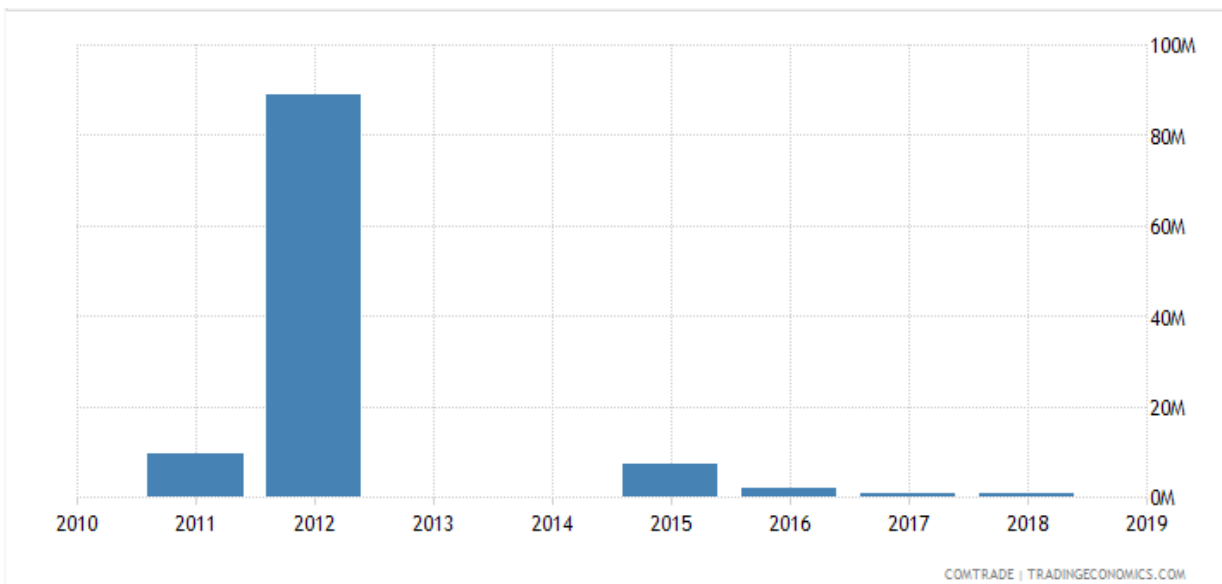
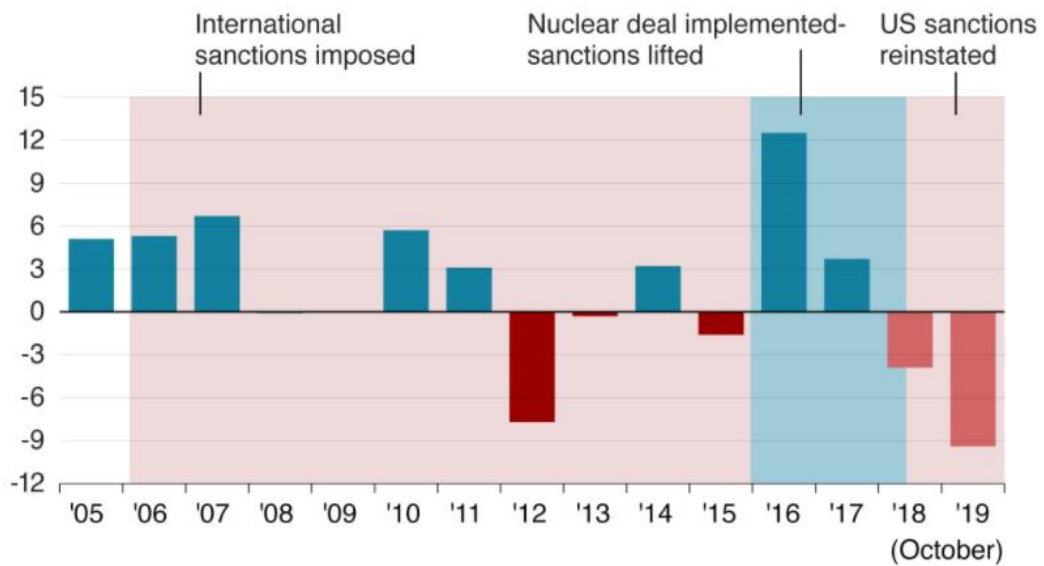


Figure 4: Bahraini exports to Iran. From: tradingeconomics.com

Economic growth in Iran

GDP growth rate %



Source: Central Bank of Iran, IMF

BBC

Figure 13: Iranian Economic Growth between 2005 and 2019. From BBC.com