



Parahyangan Catholic University
Faculty of Social and Political Sciences
International Relations Department

Accredited A

SK BAN-PT NO: 3095/SK/BAN-PT/Akred/S/VIII/2019

US Use of Force towards Iran around the Persian Gulf After
JCPOA Withdrawal

Undergraduate Thesis

Study of Politics and International Security

Submitted for Thesis Examination of Undergraduate Level

By

Aldo Arya Pradhana

2017330218

Bandung

2021



Parahyangan Catholic University
Faculty of Social and Political Sciences
International Relations Department

Accredited A

SK BAN-PT NO: 3095/SK/BAN-PT/Akred/S/VIII/2019

**US Use of Force towards Iran around the Persian Gulf After
JCPOA Withdrawal**

Undergraduate Thesis

By

Aldo Arya Pradhana

2017330218

Supervisor

Idil Syawfi, S.IP., M.Si.

Bandung

2021

Faculty of Social and Political Sciences
International Relations Department



Thesis Validation

Name : Aldo Arya Pradhana

NPM : 2017330218

Title : US Use of Force towards Iran around the Persian Gulf After JCPOA Withdrawal

Has been examined in Final Examination

On Thursday, 28th of January 2021

And thereby declared **PASSED**

The Board of Examiners


Chairperson and Member of Examiners

Dr. I Nyoman Sudira

: 

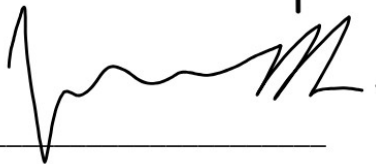
Supervisor

Idil Syawfi, S.IP., M.Si

: 

Member of Examiners

Adrianus Harsawaskita, S.IP., MA

: 

Approved by,

Dean of Faculty of Social and Political Science



Dr. Pius Sugeng Prasetyo, M.Si

STATEMENT

I, the undersigned.

Name : Aldo Arya Pradhana

NPM : 2017330218

Department : International Relations

Title : US Use of Force towards Iran around the Persian Gulf After JCPOA Withdrawal

Hereby declare that this research titled “US Use of Force towards Iran around the Persian Gulf After JCPOA Withdrawal” is a product of my own intellectual work and is itself unique from others that were previously proposed to gain an academic degree. Ideas, statements, and information acquired from various sources are officially cited in this research in accordance with the generally agreed scientific writing method.

I declare this statement with full responsibility and willing to take any consequences in accordance to academic rules in case this statement is proven to be false.

Bandung, 3rd February, 2021



Aldo Arya Pradhana

2017330218

ABSTRACT

Name : Aldo Arya Pradhana

NPM : 2017330219

Title : US Use of Force towards Iran around the Persian Gulf after JCPOA

Withdrawal

The JCPOA at the time of its inception in 2015 was considered as a milestone for US – Iran relations despite criticisms towards the deal. Shortly after President Donald J. Trump took office, the US viewed that the deal was not proportionate with Iran's actions in the Middle East and served as a restriction for the US to exert pressure and end Iran's malign activities and controversial nuclear program. Eventually the US withdrew from the deal in 2018. The events following the withdrawal from the deal is often associated with that of heightened regional tension between the US and Iran, especially in the Persian Gulf. As the US withdrew from the JCPOA, it is unclear whether the US would reengage in dialogue and come up with a new deal. Moreover, instead of a reengagement of dialogue, the US has been stepping up its exertion of pressure mainly in terms of diplomatic and economic pressures towards Iran. In addition to diplomatic and economic pressures, the US has also stepped up its pressure through Iran-focused employment of military muscle in the region. In order to shed light to the reasoning as to why the US stepped up its Iran-focused employment of military muscle, the research will utilize the scientific tool of Offense-Defense theory as interpreted by Stephen Van Evera. The theory argues that military, geographic, social and political order, and diplomatic factors play key role in shaping offense-defense balance of a state which affect offensive or defensive tendencies of a state. Offense-dominance is often attributed with the presence of dangers of offense-dominance as explained by Stephen Van Evera. This research finds out that based on the military and geographic factors of US military deployment in the Persian Gulf as well as the factor of diplomatic arrangements in the Gulf, the US tend to have an offense-advantage which led to US tendencies to resort to use of force in its relation with Iran.

Keywords: JCPOA, Persian Gulf, use of force, Iran, military, offense-defense balance, US, deployment, pressure, regional

ABSTRAK

Nama : Aldo Arya Pradhana

NPM : 2017330218

Judul : Penggunaan Kekuatan AS terhadap Iran di sekitar Teluk Persia Setelah Keluar dari JCPOA

JCPOA dianggap sebagai momen yang bersejarah bagi hubungan AS – Iran pada saat pertama dibentuk pada tahun 2015 meskipun banyak kritisisme terhadap kesepakatan ini. Tidak lama setelah Presiden Donald J. Trump mulai menjabat, AS memandang bahwa kesepakatan ini tidak sebanding dengan tindakan Iran di Timur Tengah dan merupakan sebuah hambatan bagi AS untuk menekan Iran dan menagkhiri aktivitas buruk Iran serta program Nuklir Iran yang kontroversial. Pada akhirnya AS keluar dari kesepakatan tersebut pada tahun 2018. Hal-hal yang terjadi setelah keluarnya AS ini sering dikaitkan dengan ketegangan tinggi antara AS dan Iran, khususnya di Teluk Persia. Tidak jelas hal nya apakah AS akan kembali terlibat dalam dialog dan menghasilkan kesepakatan baru. Bahkan melainkan terlibat kembali dalam dialog, AS telah meningkatkan tekanan terhadap Iran terutama dalam segi tekanan diplomatik dan ekonomi. Sebagai tambahan terhadap tekanan diplomatik dan ekonomi, AS juga telah meningkatkan tekanan melalui pengerahan kekuatan militer di kawasan tersebut yang terfokus pada Iran. Dalam rangka menjelaskan pertimbangan di balik mengapa AS telah meningkatkan pengerahan kekuatan militer yang terfokus pada Iran, penelitian ini akan menggunakan alat ilmiah yang berupa teori *Offense-Defense* seperti yang diinterpretasi oleh Stephen Van Evera. Teori ini berargumen bahwa faktor-faktor militer, geografis, tatanan sosial dan politik, serta diplomatik memainkan peran kunci dalam pembentukan *offense-defense balance* sebuah negara yang dapat mempengaruhi kecenderungan ofensif atau defensif sebuah negara. *Offense-dominance* dalam teori ini sering diatributkan dengan adanya bahaya-bahaya *offense-dominance* seperti yang dijelaskan oleh Stephen Van Evera. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa berdasarkan faktor-faktor militer dan geografis dari pengerahan kekuatan militer AS di Teluk Persia serta faktor tatanan diplomatik di teluk, AS cenderung memiliki keuntungan ofensif yang berujung pada kecenderungan AS untuk mengerahkan kekuatannya dalam hubungannya dengan Iran.

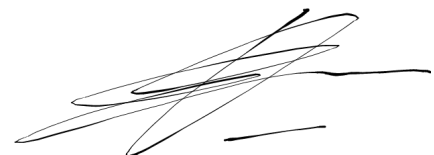
Kata Kunci: JCPOA, Teluk Persia, penggunaan kekuatan, Iran, militer, *offense-defense balance*, AS, *deployment*, tekanan, regional

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

In the name of God, the most gracious and compassionate.

This research titled “US Use of Force towards Iran around the Persian Gulf after JCPOA Withdrawal” is arranged in order to fulfill the requirement for bachelor’s degree in the study of International Relations of the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences of Parahyangan Catholic University. The author of this research acknowledges that there may be imperfections of this research and points which could be further improved. Therefore, the author is open for comments and constructive criticisms. It is highly hoped that this research is of a great benefit to the readers and would inspire the creation of future research based on a similar topic. The author would also like to appreciate the supervisor of this research, Mr. Idil, and examiners of the thesis from the International Relations department of Parahyangan Catholic University for their support to improve the research. Deep appreciation also for all friends and family who have been supporting the writing of this research.

Bandung, 11th January 2021



Aldo Arya Pradhana
2017330218

TABLE OF CONTENTS

STATEMENT	4
ABSTRACT	5
ABSTRAK	6
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	7
KEY ABBREVIATIONS	9
CHAPTER 1	10
1.1. Background	10
1.2. Research Problems	12
1.2.1. Research Question	14
1.2.2. Research Problems Limitation	14
1.3. Purpose of Research	15
1.4. Benefit of Research	15
1.5. Literature Review	16
1.6. Theoretical Framework	24
1.7. Research Method and Data Collection Technique	30
1.8. Research Outline	31
CHAPTER 2	34
2.1. US Withdrawal from JCPOA and Its Immediate Aftermath	34
2.2. US Behavioral shifts towards Iran and the “Maximum Pressure” Approach	41
2.3. Constellation of Power of Prominent Actors in and around the Persian Gulf	49
2.4. Employment of US Military Muscle Aimed at Iran and Proxies around the Persian Gulf as a Use of Force	52
CHAPTER 3	60
3.1. Iranian Military Power and Activities through US Perspective	60
3.2. Offense-Defense Balance behind US Use of Force in and around the Persian Gulf	67
3.2.1. Military Factors of Offense-Defense Balance	67
3.2.2. Geographic Factors of Offense-Defense Balance	72
3.2.3. Diplomatic Factors of US Offense-Defense Balance	74
3.3. Stephen Van Evera’s Dangers of Offense Dominance	77
CHAPTER 4	82
REFERENCES	85

KEY ABBREVIATIONS

JCPOA	: Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
US	: United States
IRGC	: Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps
EU	: European Union
UN	: United Nations
UNSC	: United Nations Security Council
INARA	: Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act
UK	: United Kingdom
MESA	: Middle East Strategic Alliance
IMSC	: International Maritime Security Construct
UAE	: United Arab Emirates
DOD	: Department of Defense
DIA	: Defense Intelligence Agency
IRGCN	: Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps Navy
IRIN	: Islamic Republic of Iran Navy
CENTCOM	: Central Command
THAAD	: Terminal High Altitude Area Defense

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1. Background

The JCPOA or the Iran Nuclear deal was deemed ineffective by the United States to contain the Iranian threat in the Middle East region and Persian Gulf in particular and to halt its controversial nuclear program which led to the US no longer participating in the deal as of the year 2018. Many parties of the deal had expected the US to renegotiate with Iran and come up with the deal. The most preferable course of action for the US is to resort to peaceful international mechanism to secure a more favorable terms with Iran. However, it is unclear whether the US is going to reengage in negotiation with Iran.

The JCPOA was initially formed as a deal which would enable Iran to stabilize its economy with the removal of some economic sanctions in exchange for halting or suspending some aspects of its nuclear program which had become the concern of many states especially the US, Israel, Gulf Arab states, and EU members, that it would be used to develop a nuclear weapon which could destabilize the region. The deal was reached and signed by the five permanent UN members, Iran, Germany and EU. Iran's nuclear program was to be closely monitored by the IAEA in accordance with the deal.¹

The United States, one of the main participants of the JCPOA was, according to the

¹ Kelsey Davenport, "The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) at a Glance ", Arms Control Association, 2018. Accessed 14 February 2020.

deal, also obligated to lift some of its sanctions on Iran. This deal was one of the most significant improvement in the relation of US with Iran after the 1979 Islamic Revolution Iran which had deteriorated the relation between the two countries.

The suspension of sanctions and lack of ability to assert more pressure in the form of economic sanctions concerned the US as to not being able to deter Iran enough so that it would not disturb US interest in the region. This led to the US leaving the JCPOA in 2018 because it had thought that the JCPOA was not effective enough to exert pressure and contain Iran in regards with its growing influence and controversial nuclear program.² On top of that, the US had thought that Iran's actions in and around the Middle East, and around the Persian Gulf in particular, is not proportionate with the sanction relief provided by the JCPOA deal. This move created a great degree of controversy between the two countries and other parties involved in the deal.

With the US having abandoned the deal, it is unclear whether the US would renegotiate to achieve a more preferable deal to the US. If the JCPOA deal was not considered satisfactory to the US government due to Iran's actions which the US had perceived as being not proportionate with the advantages in the form of sanction relief, it is expected for the US government to take peaceful measures in accordance with the existing international mechanisms to push Iran to refrain from further doing such actions which the US deems as threatening and not proportionate to the deal. However, with the uncertainty of US administration following the withdrawal from the deal in 2018, it is still rather unclear whether the US would renegotiate the deal.

² Mark Landler, "Trump Abandons Iran Nuclear Deal He Long Scorned," *The New York Times*, May 8, 2018

1.2. Research Problems

The US withdrawal from the JCPOA deal has created a situation in which relation between Iran and the US has been growing more and more tense over issues regarding respective state's national interests in the region of Persian Gulf and its surroundings.³ The JCPOA was considered a diplomatic milestone in US – Iran relations after the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979. The signing of JCPOA saw a major improvement in relations between the two countries and tension between the two eased up in favor of more dialogue and diplomacy. However, it was later seen as a restriction that prevented the US to exert more pressure in the form of sanctions and the deal was seen as not proportionate with Iran's actions in the Middle East. Following US withdrawal from JCPOA, the US has been intensifying its pressure in the form of sanctions and, on top of that, diplomatic pressures and intensified military approach aimed at countering Iran. However, the reason why the US opted for more intense military approach is questionable with other economic and diplomatic pressures already in place. If the US saw the deal as a restriction or if the deal was not proportionate and viewed as one-sided, the US would engage in more dialogue for a renewed deal. However, what happened was quite the opposite and the US has since stepped up its pressures towards Iran, especially militarily.

The use of force by the US has become a concern for fear of igniting an escalation of a major armed conflict in the region. This is important because the US holds its position as a key player in the Persian Gulf and thus their actions have a significant impact to the dynamics of security and stability in the region. US use of

³ Ibid

force towards Iran and Iran's growing resentment and actions against the US after US withdrawal from JCPOA hold a huge implication to the security situation of the region. Intensification of US naval presence as well as other military assets along with growing US support for its regional allies in the Persian Gulf to deter Iran mark the increase confrontative tendency by the US towards Iran. On the other hand, Iran has also intensified military drills in the Persian Gulf and increased harassment of western military and civilian shipment in the region.⁴ It is imperative to understand the reasoning behind US use of force, mainly in terms of the employment of military power, towards Iran after its withdrawal from JCPOA and its intensification of pressure towards the Islamic Republic.

The tension between the two US and Iran after US withdrawal from the JCPOA further deteriorated and has left many worried of the possibility of a direct escalation between the two powers with the Persian Gulf and its surrounding as the most likely arena. The use of force by the US is marked by the increase of US military presence around the Persian Gulf and intensified military activity against Iran's interests in the region. The dynamics of power-relation between the two countries in the region have a great implication on the security situation of the region and has become a great concern for states around the Persian Gulf. With the importance of the region in regards of global oil production, this situation could also have a significant global impact.

⁴ "Iran Seizes British Tanker in Strait of Hormuz," *BBC*, July 27, 2019

1.2.1. Research Question

The problems which surround the issue of US – Iran power-relation around the Persian Gulf following US withdrawal from the JCPOA lead to a question concerning the topic of security situation around the Persian Gulf and US use of force towards Iran. This question will be the basis of this research which aims to shed light on the problems stated above. The main question of this research is as the following:

What influenced the US to resort to use of force towards Iran around the Persian Gulf region after US withdrawal from JCPOA?

1.2.2. Research Problems Limitation

This research will focus on several key specifications in order to limit the scope of the research to have an accurate and pin-point analysis regarding the problems stated above. The research will be limited based on specific time frame and issues. This research will be mainly focused on the time frame of post-JCPOA withdrawal by the United States as mentioned above which was followed by series of hostilities between the two states around the Persian Gulf, specifically within the time frame of 2018 - 2020. This research will also focus on the use of force which the US had employed to deal with Iran in and around the Persian Gulf region. The use of force in this research will be more focused on but not limited to the growing military presence and involvement of the US military both directly and indirectly through military assistance to allied Gulf states to counter Iran.

1.3. Purpose of Research

This research seeks to give readers an insight on the rationale behind US use of force towards Iran, mainly in the military sense, following US withdrawal from JCPOA. On top of that, this research also seeks to present valid data regarding the use of force by the US which involve US military build-up and employment of military muscle in and around the Persian Gulf as well as the reasoning behind such policies.

1.4. Benefit of Research

It is hoped that this research would contribute to the series of academic research regarding the US – Iran relations, especially during the periods after the Islamic Revolution in Iran. The author also hopes that this research would be a fine contribution to the studies of security of the Persian Gulf region and the power-relation of states in the Persian Gulf and the surrounding. Noting that the issue of hostilities between the two countries following the JCPOA withdrawal by the US is still considerably a very recent issue within the International Society, the author hopes that this research would also inspire future research regarding the topic of US – Iran relation in the Persian Gulf especially regarding the hostilities between the two countries after US withdrawal from JCPOA and their respective views and approaches to counter each other in the region.

1.5. Literature Review

There are various scholars and researchers who have covered the issue of the US use of force towards Iran, especially following the US withdrawal from JCPOA. The most common consensus among scholars and researchers is that the US withdrawal from JCPOA has some degree of implication on the current stance which the US has adopted in order to deal with Iran. The US stance which is often attributed with the use of force is a rational product of US national interests in regards to perceived threats to the US influence in the region.

Kenneth Katzman, Kathleen J. McInnis, and Clayton Thomas from *The Congressional Research Service* described in their research titled “US-Iran Conflict and Implications for US Policy” that the US withdrawal from JCPOA is closely related if not part of a bigger scheme of US policy of “maximum pressure” on Iran, mainly economically through sanctions, in order to pressure Iran into submission to cease its threats towards US interests in the region and to renegotiate its nuclear deal.⁵ This policy towards Iran’s economy is also followed by series of political actions against Iran with the US including the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps or IRGC in short into the list of Foreign Terrorist Groups which then gives US justifications to strike against IRGC or IRGC-backed targets in various places. In return, Iran considered the US CENTCOM or US military Central Command in the Middle East as a terrorist organization which further deteriorates the relations between the two states following

⁵ Kenneth Katzman, Kathleen J. McInnis, and Thomas Clayton, “US-Iran Conflict and Implications for US Policy,” *Congressional Research Service*, January 6, 2020. Page 1

US withdrawal from the JCPOA.⁶ Key events which shows the intensity of hostilities between the two states include Iranian seizure of tanker ships in the Persian Gulf, Iranian downing of US drones, alleged Iranian-backed groups attack on US assets in Iraq, as well as the latest US strike which killed top ranking Iranian general Soleimani which prompted a rise in hostility between the two states.⁷

With all being said, the researchers from *The Congressional Research Service* viewed that there are several considerations regarding the use of US military asset to counter the Iranian threat which are although not recommended but should be taken into consideration. Such consideration for the use of US military assets are targeted operations towards Iranian proxies and states allied with Iran, Retaliation against Iranian key strategic assets in case of Iranian attack, Military blockade, or an invasion. These forms of possible employment of military assets play a big role in US stance towards Iran. Considerations regarding the US military resources such as the number of additional forces needed to conduct such military action against Iran, the intensity of the missions required to be executed by the troops, and the time required to conduct the military action need to be put into account as almost if not all of which have high implication towards the outcome of the military action towards Iran.⁸ These implications also could serve as considerations for the use of force by the US, especially in terms of employment of military muscle, towards Iran in the Persian Gulf.

⁶ Department of State, Office of the Spokesperson, Factsheet: Designation of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, April 8, 2019. Cited from Kenneth Katzman, Kathleen J. McLinnis, and Thomas Clayton, "US-Iran Conflict and Implications for US Policy," *Congressional Research Service*, January 6, 2020. Page 1

⁷ Ibid. Pages 2 - 12

⁸ Ibid. Pages 15 - 18

In a more extreme view in a journal published by *Jewish Institute for National Security of America* (JINSA) and written by the team of JINSA's *Gemunder Center Iran Task Force* titled "Comprehensive US Strategy Toward Iran after The JCPOA", the writers expressed the need of aggressive measures towards Iran in order to successfully counter and contain Iranian threat and bring about stability in the region. The writers argued that there is a need of a "maximum leverage" towards Iran by utilizing every elements of US power as well as that of its allies to pressure Iran by targeting its vulnerabilities.⁹ In this journal, the writers have formulated a comprehensive US strategy in countering the Iranian threat which include the following aspects; The first aspect of this comprehensive US strategy is the enforcement of tough sanctions against Iran as one form of pressure among other possible forms of pressure that could be applied against Iran. This calls for the reinstation and the enforcement of extensive sanctions against Iran to harm Iran's capabilities in asserting its influence and power in the region. The second aspect is strengthening US regional allies to counter Iran. The writers argued that strengthening US regional allies is imperative because the US military role in the Middle East, and Persian Gulf in particular, is still somewhat uncertain and the first ones to counter the Iranian threat will be none other than its allies thus there is a strong need to strengthen US regional allies to form the first line of defense against Iranian threat. The third aspect is the blockage of Iranian expansion in Syria and Iraq. The writers view that Syria and Iraq are two strategic arenas in which Iran has had a quite extensive influence in which would be exploited to directly harm US interest in the region. Stopping the expansion of Iranian influence

⁹ Eric Edelman and Charles Wald, "Comprehensive US Strategy toward Iran after JCPOA," *JINSA's Gemunder Center Iran Task Force*, September 2018

in these two countries would deny Iran a strong foothold which could limit its capabilities of exerting dominance and threat in the region. This view is becoming more and more relevant as of lately because the two countries has been the arena of Iran - US confrontation, though in most cases are indirectly. The fourth aspect is to wage a concerted political warfare campaign against Iran. This aspect of the strategy involves altering domestic views towards the Iranian government through political campaigns waged through various channels such as the cyber space which would hurt its credibility among its citizens. The fifth aspect of this strategy is to conduct a proactive diplomacy in order to gather many states to pressure Iran over its growing aggressive gesture in the region. The last aspect is to update US military contingency plans against Iran to include a more aggressive plan that would hurt Iran's critical assets that are necessary for Iran's deterrence and exertion of power.¹⁰ This comprehensive strategy formulated by JINSA provides an overly aggressive approach towards countering Iran's power in the region but it does not put into consideration US resources needed to implement the strategy. However, it did briefly explain the rationale behind US intensification of pressure, especially in the form of military assistance to allied states or direct military and political pressure towards Iran.

The next literature would explain an Iranian perspective towards the security dilemma with the US in the Persian Gulf. In his article titled "Balance of Power in The Persian Gulf: An Iranian View", Dr. Kayhan Barzegar argued that the current system of balance of power implemented in the Persian Gulf is inherently a zero-sum game which results in a security dilemma between Iran and other regional powers with the

¹⁰ Ibid. pages 9 - 16

United States as the main competitor.¹¹ This is the case because theoretically speaking, balance of power as the prominent approach in the Persian Gulf comprises of deterrence, containment, and equilibrium and is *offensive* in nature which Dr. Barzegar argued that in the implementation resulted in tension.¹² Thus, Dr. Barzegar proposed for a new system non zero-sum system of “Balance of Security” in the Persian Gulf. This system of “Balance of Security” is a *defensive* system by nature and is based on a win-win relation and the increase of state’s relative security. Dr. Barzegar viewed that it is necessary for the US to lift its aggressive tendencies towards Iran in order for Iran to do the same and alter its foreign policy into a more cooperative one. Only then a “Balance of Security” could be achieved. In general, the author expressed the need to shift the nature of security in the Persian Gulf from a traditional form into a non-traditional form which would include other issues such as energy security.¹³

This article provides an insight into Iran’s perspective regarding the state of security dilemma in the Persian Gulf and what caused this security dilemma to come forth. Dr. Barzegar implied that US growing aggressive tendencies in the Persian Gulf has a weak justification and that the US, along with other major Gulf powers need to come up with an alternative in order to bring stability to the Gulf. However, this view is too idealistic in nature and tend to not put more attention on Iran’s own effort in building its chain of influence to secure its own national interest in the region which

¹¹ Kayhan Barzegar, “Balance of Power in The Persian Gulf: An Iranian View” September 2010.

¹² Benjamin Miller, “The International System and Regional Balance in the Middle East” in *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century*, T.V Paul, James J. Wirtz, and Michel Fortmann, eds. (Stanford University Press, 2004), page. 255 cited in Kayhan Barzegar, “Balance of Power in The Persian Gulf: An Iranian View,” September 2010.

¹³ Ibid

also led to US containment efforts and its aggressive tendencies and use of force towards Iran.

Albert B. Wolf in his article titled “After JCPOA: American grand strategy toward Iran” featured in the “Comparative Strategy” journal lays out and expresses general US interests in the Middle East in relation to Iran and the possible options of US grand strategy towards Iran. Wolf argues that there are four main interests of the US in the middle east, they are namely: energy security, nuclear proliferation, terrorism, and the security of Israel as US main regional ally. These main interests are to some extent affected by Iranian behavior and influence. Iran’s geographical location and Iran’s position as an oil-rich state has a significant potential implication to world supply of oil since a significant percentage of world oil supply pass through the Persian Gulf and the Hormuz strait which houses significant Iranian activity. This allows Iran to potentially control oil price by manipulating supply and demand which could dangerously lead to a conflict. Nuclear proliferation in the Middle East is also one source of concern to the US since nuclear proliferation could limit US’ ability to exercise projection of conventional military power in the region. The emergence of another nuclear power in the Middle East could severely alter the stability in the region. In this case, Iran’s growing nuclear program is a great concern to the US in the region. On top of that, countering terrorism has been US main focus in the Middle East for years following the 9/11 attacks. Iran’s activity of promoting armed insurgencies in the region becomes a concerning factor in this regard. Countering terrorism is also closely tied with the security of Israel as US main regional ally. Iran has been sponsoring

groups such as the Hezbollah which for the past few decades has been waging attacks towards Israel.¹⁴

In relation to these main interests, Wolf lays out four possible strategies the US could adopt to deal with Iran in the region. The first possible strategy is *Rollback*. In summary, the main goal of *Rollback* strategy is to push Iranian influence away from other regional states and back to Iran's borders because Iran's influence in the region is seen as an existential threat and needs to be pushed back. Critiques of this approach argues that proponents of *Rollback* strategy is heavily overestimating Iran's threat in the region and that *Rollback* strategy could trigger a complex situation in which conflict is likely. Second possible strategy is *Offshore Balancing*. This strategy relies on mere deterrence while minimizing exposure by drawing down US regional commitments and limiting military activity in the region by only maintaining its residual force presence (RFP) in the region. This way the US would still maintain a level of influence in the region while limiting its regional affairs in the Middle East thus the possibility of conflict is lower. Critiques of this strategy argues that the US could easily miscalculate because it would not be clear to the US which issues possess the significant threat which would alter the balance of power in the region and the world until it would spin out of control and too late for the US to intervene and stop it or the US could involve itself too far in a matter that is of a low priority interest. Another criticism to this strategy is that due to limited US affairs in the region, the US would have no clear guidance to which issues do or do not matter which would lead to poorly resourced version of *Rollback* due to its emphasis on RFP in case a situation rises which would require

¹⁴ Albert B. Wolf, "After JCPOA: American grand strategy toward Iran" in *Comparative Strategy*, 2018

intervention. Third possible strategy is *Retrenchment*, this strategy involves pulling out to stop US decline or to reverse the decline. There are three factors why the US would *retrench*, the first is due to the fear of decline thus emerges the need to reprioritize and reorganize, the second is due to the growing level of anti-Americanism, and the third is due to budgetary reasons. Critiques argue that *Retrenchment* would further worsen the already complex security dilemma in the region. Another criticism argue that *Retrenchment* is not guaranteed will reverse relative material decline. *Retrenchment* is also viewed as difficult to implement due to domestic political reasons since some powerful domestic political players that have heavily invested in a region would likely be opposed to pull out of the region. The fourth possible strategy is *Transformative Engagement*. This strategy involves unceasing political dialogue with Iran to achieve US goals in the region, this includes the formation of agreements such as the JCPOA. However, critiques are skeptical that this strategy could be exploited by Iran and there is always a possibility of Iran's defection from dialogue. Overall, this literature comprehensively lays out various possible grand strategy approaches the US could adopt to deal with Iran in the region along with criticisms to each respective strategies. This literature does not state which strategy the US is more than likely to adopt after the withdrawal from JCPOA, however the author did express himself that the article is only meant to refine the debate over US grand strategy and does not specifically analyze or point out which of the approaches are most likely to be adopted.¹⁵

The general position of this research views that US withdrawal from JCPOA has a quite significant effect to the already tense US – Iran relations and in particular

¹⁵ Ibid

the US use of force towards Iran in and around the Persian Gulf. Such case of use of force is apparent with the growing US military presence and involvement in the Persian Gulf and its surroundings as well as growing US support for its regional allies aimed at countering the perceived Iranian threat. The situation in the Persian Gulf has been deteriorating since US' decision to leave the JCPOA. This is marked by the spark of hostilities and incidents between US Military forces along with its allies in the region and Iran. Extensive US military presence in the Persian Gulf along with support from Gulf partners allows the US to take extensive measures and the use of force as well as implementing a more confrontative strategy in countering Iran in the Persian Gulf.

1.6. Theoretical Framework

Stephen van Evera in his article titled “Offense, Defense, and Causes of War” explained that the main hypothesis of Offense-Defense theory is that a state is more likely to use force when conquest is easy thus offense is strong. The difficulty of conquest to be conducted or whether offense is strong or not constitutes to the dominance of offense or defense. However, dominance of offense or defense could also be perceived. Therefore, Offense-Defense theory has two parallel variants – the real and the perceptual.¹⁶

¹⁶ Stephen Van Evera, “Offense, Defense, and the Causes of War,” *International Security* 22, no. 4 (1998): pp. 5-43, <https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.22.4.5>.

There are several factors that could influence the dominance of either defense or offense. These factors are military factors, geography, social and political order, and diplomatic factors.¹⁷

Military Factors – Military factors of Offense-Defense balance is mainly influenced by technology, doctrine, and force posture and deployment. Technology can potentially favor the attacker or the defender. One such example is the construction of fortresses which are mainly used for defensive purposes. These fortresses strengthens the tendency towards defense. On the other hand, when an attacking force is able to acquire more advanced siege technology or heavier cannons, defense loses dominance and the tendency for offense strengthens. Technology in combination with doctrine often define tides of offense and defense. Doctrine is best known as fundamental set of principles that guide the military in order to achieve national security objectives.¹⁸ Additionally, militaries often shape offense and defense balance through military posture and force deployment.

Geography – Specific geographic features can support or impede offense. Oceans, dense jungles, and mountains often pose as a challenge towards an attacking force and thus limits offense. On the other hand, flat and open terrain such as steppe usually favor an attacking force as it allows the movement of a big force.

Social and Political Order – Social and political order is often associated with popularity of regimes or governments. Stephen Van Evera argues that conquest is

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), "AAP-06 NATO Glossary of Terms and Definitions, Edition 2018," <https://nso.nato.int/natoterm/content/nato/pages/home.html?lg=en>. (AAP-06 NATO Glossary of Terms and Definitions, Edition 2018 2018)

probably harder for popular regimes nowadays. Inversely, conquest is expected to be more common and easier for unpopular regimes.

Diplomatic Factors – There are three diplomatic arrangements that tend to strengthen defense, these are (1) collective security systems, (2) defensive alliance, (3) balancing behavior by neutral states. Collective Security systems and Defensive alliance differ by the type of aggressor that they are focused on. Defensive alliance theoretically limit conquest by the promise of mutual help and collective action against outside aggressor (e.g. NATO). On the other hand, collective security systems promise a mutual help and collective action against aggression by a system member (e.g. League of Nations). Balancing behavior by a neutral states is also crucial to limit conquest by a balancer states. For instance, the US and Britain are traditional balancers in Europe. Conquest tend to be more common in Europe when either or both US and Britain are weak or are isolationist. On the other hand, conquest is harder when either or both balancers are strong and willing to intervene.¹⁹

The article “*What Is the Offense-Defense Balance and Can We Measure It? (Offense, Defense, and International Politics)*” mentioned that there are two approaches to identifying offense-defense balance, the broad and the narrow approaches. The narrow approach views that offense-defense balance is influenced by two variables, military factors such as technology as the most obvious factor, and geography. The other approach, the broad approach towards offense-defense balance identification argues that there are other more diverse factors such as force size,

¹⁹ Ibid

nationalism, and cumulativity of resources that should be considered in order to identify whether offense or defense gains dominance. However, critics of this approach argues that the broad approach makes offense-defense balance too hard to measure so it may seem to be the most feasible to stick with the most obvious military inputs.²⁰

There are ten basic hypotheses of the outcome or effects of offense dominance, or in this case when offense is strong.

- The **first** hypothesis is an opportunistic expansion. When other states are easy to be conquered, or perceived to be easily conquerable, aggressive and opportunist states tend to be more expansionist and is not shy from using force in order to secure gains.
- The **second** hypothesis is defensive expansionism. States that feel insecure and perceive that self-defense is difficult tend to go on a defensive expansionism in order to secure more strategic advantages to support its defense.
- The **third** hypothesis is that defensive expansionism also prompts other states to better resist expansion. This is the case due to the increased threats or perceived threats towards national security posed by other states force a state to compete and create conditions in order to feel more secure. Thus, states could at any time resort to use of force because other states are using force or expected to use force.
- The **fourth** hypothesis is that first strike is more advantageous, thus is rewarding. When offense dominates and conquest seem easy, successful first strike attacks seem to be more advantageous and rewarding in order to get rid of dangers.

²⁰ Glaser, Charles L., and Chaim Kaufmann. "What Is the Offense-Defense Balance and Can We Measure It? (Offense, Defense, and International Politics)." *International Security*, 1998. Page 6 - 9

- The **fifth** hypothesis is that of the likelihood of a preventive war or the resort to use of force in order to prevent a decline is higher when offense gains the dominance. Thus, “windows are larger and more dangerous” because states are tempted to use force in order to stop their decline.
- The **sixth** hypothesis is that fait accompli, or decisions that have been made before hand and often in secret, is more likely when offense gains the dominance because the temptation for expansion is high and certain circles within a state are more interested in gain maximizing and winning disputes rather than avoiding conflict thus creating a fait accompli.
- The **seventh** hypothesis is that states are less likely to negotiate when offense gains dominance thus likelihood for confrontation is higher.
- The **eighth** hypothesis is that states tend to be more secretive when offense dominates. This often creates blunder which could lead to armed conflict.
- The **ninth** hypothesis is that arms race is more likely to intensify when offense dominates which create either opportunity or vulnerability for states that participate in arms race and each would compete to gain the lead and feel more secure.
- The **final** hypothesis is that offense dominance is self-feeding. As conquest becomes easier or perceived to be easy and more rewarding, states tend to adopt policies that favor conquest and thus offense gain more dominance.²¹

²¹ Ibid

Stephen Van Evera argued in his article that there are two kinds of predictions of Offense-Defense theory, prime predictions and explanatory predictions. The prime predictions are: (1) War, or in the case of this research is the use of force, is more common when conquest is easy or perceived to be easy, and inversely, it is less common when conquest is difficult or perceived to be difficult. (2) States that have or believe to have large offensive opportunities or defensive vulnerabilities tend to be more confident in using force against an adversary. (3) States that have or believe to have larger offensive opportunities and defensive capabilities tend to resort to the use of force more often. Additionally, the explanatory predictions are closely related to intervening phenomena or the ten basic hypotheses of the outcome or effects of offense dominance. There are two explanatory predictions: (1) The ten dangers or effects of offense-dominance will be more rampant in periods of offense dominance or perceived offense dominance, the ten dangers should increase when offense strengthens and decrease when offense weakens. (2) States that have or believe to have more offensive opportunities or defensive vulnerabilities will adopt policies that are closely in line with the ten dangers or effects of offense dominance.²²

²² Ibid

1.7. Research Method and Data Collection Technique

The research on US use of force towards Iran in the Persian Gulf following the withdrawal from JCPOA will mainly be conducted qualitatively with a qualitative research method. Generally, qualitative research is often associated with the absence of quantifications in its research with more emphasis being placed on exploration to seek for meaning. Qualitative research also emphasizes on inductive approach in the context of theory and research. In this sense, theory plays a significant role throughout the course of the research. Qualitative research is also often described as interpretivist, in this sense qualitative research heavily emphasizes on the study of social world through the examination of interpretation of this social world. This type of research is viewed as constructionist in nature because it implies that social properties as outcomes of social interaction between actors. In this case, qualitative research also views the social reality as constantly changing throughout the time.²³

Data that will be used for this research will be acquired from various sources that are related to the focus of the issue of this research. These various sources may range from credible news articles, journals, books, memos, government official publications, and government official statements. The acquired data will then be processed through qualitative data analysis with the help of the offense-defense theory in order to gain findings to answer the main research question and to come to a strong scientific conclusion of the research.

²³ Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012) Pages 380 – 381

1.8. Research Outline

The research regarding US use of force towards Iran in the Persian Gulf following the withdrawal from JCPOA will be written in the following systematical format:

Chapter 1 – Introduction

This chapter aims to give the reader general information on the basic framework of the research. This chapter includes the background of the issue of US – Iran rivalry following US withdrawal from JCPOA in regards to the use of force by the US towards Iran in the Persian Gulf. In order to conduct a thorough and accurate analysis, this chapter will also seek to identify some of the problems which are meant to be the focus of the analysis in this research. Those problems will eventually develop into a research question which will be the main basis of this research. This chapter also includes research limitation in order to narrow the scope of the research to have a pin-point analysis on the problem. Other things included in this chapter are purpose of research, benefit of research, literature review which include several key views towards the problem from various sources, Theoretical framework which would serve as the tool of analysis, and lastly research method and data collection technique.

Chapter 2 - Dynamics of US – Iran Relation and Persian Gulf Power Landscape in regards to US Withdrawal from JCPOA

The second chapter of the research will mainly be focused on the general nature of US approach towards Iran following its unilateral decision to withdraw from JCPOA. This chapter will seek to provide information regarding US withdrawal from JCPOA as a background context which led to series of tension with Iran, especially around the area of the Persian Gulf. This chapter will also seek to lay out the general information regarding US behavior towards Iran under the administration of president Doland J. Trump after the decision to withdraw from JCPOA as well as constellation of power of prominent regional states in the Persian Gulf and the employment of US military muscle around the region of Persian Gulf aimed at deterring Iran.

Chapter 3 – Offense-Defense Analysis of US Use of Force towards Iran

This chapter will seek to analyze the factors which influenced the US to resort to use of force towards Iran through the scope of Stephen Van Evera’s interpretation of Offense-Defense theory. This chapter will include US general perspective on Iran’s military power and activities which become one of the main concerns of the US in the region. Moreover, this research will focus on the analysis of US offense-defense balance in the region through the scope of military, geographic, and diplomatic factors. Lastly, to support the argument regarding the presence of offense-dominance, this section will include Stephen Van Evera’s dangers of offense-dominance which occur

in and around the Persian Gulf which may suggest the presence of an offense-dominance.

Chapter 4 – Conclusion

This final chapter will lay out key findings based on the information from the previous chapters, mainly the second and third chapter. Also, this chapter will seek to draw the conclusion to answer the main research question based on the findings of this research. Lastly, this chapter will include statement of recommendation for future research and how this research can be improved.