IBERIAN MUN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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*The Question of Increasing Instability in the Persian Gulf*

Tensions in the Persian Gulf have escalated throughout the year of 2019, building upon a previously uneasy situation. Iran began researching and constructing sites for nuclear energy in the 1960’s with aid from the United States. It continued building upon its facilities and expanding the use of nuclear energy during the following decades. In doing so, various states grew suspicious with Iran’s nuclear activities, fearing that it had commenced a nuclear weapons program. This would signify having defied the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, that was signed and ratified by Iran in the late 1960’s. Debates between the US, the UN Security Council, the European Union and Iran have maintained since the early stages of this conflict, attempting to ensure that Iran does not pursue nuclear energy for military purposes. Hence, sanctions on areas such as oil and gas have been placed on Iran. In 2013, Iran and the P5+1 agreed on the Joint Plan of Action, which meant reduced sanctions on Iran, in turn for the latter’s transparency and halt of its nuclear weapons program. In 2015, the agreement was updated and renamed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). On May 8, 2018, Donald Trump announced the US withdrawal from the JCPOA, despite the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) having confirmed that Iran had complied with its side of the agreement. Various members of the agreement including the EU, France, and the United Kingdom have expressed concern regarding the decision from the US to withdraw, while various states from the middle east have supported the decision. Later in 2018, the European Commission enacted the Blocking Statute of 1996, condoning the US sanctions as illegal, and forbidding EU companies from complying with them.

Following the US withdrawal from the JCPOA, its implementation of further sanctions on Iran, and its unprecedented designation of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist group, tensions have seen a steady increase. In May and June of 2019, several transport ships in the Persian Gulf were damaged, for which the US blamed Iran; Iran denied these accusations. Later, Iran shot down an American surveillance drone having allegedly violated sovereign airspace, nearly prompting an armed response from the US. Despite the US not responding with military force, the situation furthered conflicts between the nations. An Iranian oil tanker allegedly shipping to Syria was seized by Britain, citing EU sanctions. Iran responded with apprehending a British oil tanker and crew members, to which the UK retaliated by supplying military forces to join the United States in the Persian Gulf.

The Iranian president Hassan Rouhani set a limit of sixty days for the EU and influential member states to reach a new consensus surrounding Iranian nuclear energy, after which it would resume improved uranium enrichment.

There have been various responses to the conflict. Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi made a statement expressing China’s opposition to the US sanctions, and support of the Iranian will to protect its interests. Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov challenged the US’s choice to shoot down an Iranian drone, stating that its evidence for the drone being Iranian was vague. Oman called upon Iran to release the captured British oil tanker, and for the two nations to reach diplomatic resolution of the conflict. French foreign minister Jean-Yves Le Drian noted that it would continue negotiations with Iran as it wished, despite the stance of the US. Further, it criticized Trump for his manner of dealing with the tensions in the Persian Gulf. After the Iranian oil tanker headed for Syria was released, the United States threatened to sanction any member states dealing with the ship. Furthermore, the US government expressed its disappointment with the UK for allowing the oil tanker to be released.

This conflict is one that has been ongoing for many years, and this year has reached a particular peak. Tensions between countries in the Persian Gulf, terrorist organizations, the US, the UK and EU are at a critical point, and it is of utmost importance to settle the conflict. If no decisive measures are taken to limit the conflict, it could have tremendous impacts on international trade and politics, potentially extending into a threat of peace and security.