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The U.S. finds itself on both sides of a proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia

3/27/2015

Talk about the United States being in a difficult place. One hour, the U.S. is conducting airstrikes to combat Sunni extremists -- ISIS -- in Iraq. "U.S. warplanes are now conducting airstrikes in support of Iraqi efforts to take the city of Tikrit from the terror group ISIS, the U.S. military said Wednesday," per NBC News. The next hour, it's helping aid Saudi Arabia's bombing campaign against Shiite extremists -- the Houthi rebels -- in Yemen. "Secretary of State John Kerry commended the work of the coalition and underlined U.S. support for the effort — including intelligence sharing, targeting assistance, and advisory and logistical assistance — in talks with his counterparts in the region on Thursday," according to a separate NBC report. The backdrop, of course, is the clear proxy war in the Middle East between Shiite Iran and Sunni Saudi Arabia. But as the New York Times writes, one of the reasons why the United States has taken a more active role in the bombing campaign in Iraq is because it's worried that Iran now has too much influence in the country. "If the Americans did not engage, they feared becoming marginalized by Tehran in a country where they had spilled much blood in the last decade, the officials said, speaking on condition of anonymity."

That proxy war complicates any nuclear deal with Iran

This proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia also makes a complicated nuclear deal with Iran even more complicated. And as with most deals, the last-minute negotiations are always the hardest. "Over the past few weeks, Iran has increasingly resisted any kind of formal 'framework' agreement at this stage in the negotiations, preferring a more general statement of 'understanding' followed by a final accord in June, according to Western diplomats involved in the talks," the New York Times says. "Should that position hold — one of the many unknowns of the coming days — the United States and its five negotiating partners may find themselves in the uncomfortable position of describing the accord as they understand it while the Iranians go home to offer their own version. That poses a weighty political challenge to the Obama administration." As the LA Times notes, the Iran talks restarted today, and March 31 is the firm deadline to reach a deal.