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Which Iran will emerge after sanctions end?

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Many are keeping a close watch on Iran for clues about whether the lifting of sanctions will result in Tehran continuing to export terror and foment instability in the region or whether it will join the rest of the world and play by the rules of international diplomacy. It is well known that an internal struggle is under way between conservative and reformist factions in Iran and whichever group emerges dominant will determine whether Tehran's approach will be destructive or constructive.

The events of the past week have provided little clarity for the Iran watchers. On one hand, Tehran recently fired missiles near American warships in the Gulf, failed to protect the Saudi embassy in Tehran from being overrun by a mob protesting against Saudi Arabia's execution of Shia cleric Nimr Al Nimr and has continued its incendiary rhetoric. The jail sentence imposed on Washington Post reporter Jason Rezaian on spurious charges can be seen as a cynical bid by Tehran to have an extra bargaining chip in the negotiations. But on the other hand, more moderate attitudes in Tehran can be discerned from its conciliatory approach in swiftly releasing 10 US sailors whose patrol boats encroached into Iranian waters because of mechanical problems. So too is the fact that factions within Iran determined to derail the nuclear deal with the P5+1 group have failed to prevent Iran meeting its part of the bargain, allowing sanctions to be eased.

The sanctions issue is important because Iran's struggling economy will benefit from roughly \$90 billion (Dh330bn) of assets that had been frozen and will be boosted further by Tehran re-entering the international financial system and selling its oil on the open market. In addition, European countries will lift sanctions on major industries such as gold and metal and the US will remove major Iranian entities and individuals from banned lists. Whether Tehran will choose to be constructive or destructive, it will now have far more financial capacity to enact its agenda.

Clearly, the countries on this side of the Gulf hope the moderates will prevail and Iran will realise it has far more to gain by joining the international community than from the meddling it has pursued in the region for decades. In that sense, it is up to Tehran to decide how the future will play out but it should note that it can have friends on this side of the Gulf if it can move on from its destructive policies.