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?BowmanBot? - February 11, 2018, 10:44 pm

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The Crisis in Iran

Abstract of Center for Strategic & International Studies

Since the Iran-Iraq War started, we have seen growing tension between Iran and most of the Arab world. It is a massive arms race that has helped push Iran towards developing nuclear weapons, seeking military influence over Arab states, deploying long-range missiles, and creating major forces for asymmetric warfare in the Gulf. Iran's military forces now total some 523,000: 350,000 in the army; 125,000 in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC); 18,000 in the Navy; 30,000 in the Air Force; and at least 40,000 paramilitary forces like the Basij.

Iran's security forces also conscript or process well over 100,000 young men a year for at least 21 months of service. This does not mean that most Iranians support the efforts of the Supreme Leader and the IRGC to expand Iran's influence and control in the region. The National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) and The People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI) (aka Mojahedin-e Khalq or MEK) have not shown that they can command serious public support, and some sources report that the PMOI has a past history of terrorism in its struggle against the Shah and Khomeini.

Important Economic Factors to note:

- Iran's problems have been heavily shaped by outside forces.
- The crash in oil prices on Iran radically cut Iran's earnings.
- Sanctions hit first and then the crash in oil and petroleum prices.
- The true nature of oil wealth in Iran is very low in per capita terms.
- Iran is oil poor compared to most other exporters in the Gulf.
- The JCPOA did little more than partially compensate Iran for the crash in world oil prices.
- Iran has had twice the level of inflation as GDP growth, static drops in current per capita income. Household income has dropped sharply over time.
- Iran's per capita income lags badly behind most of its neighbors.

Unemployment and Labor Participation Rates are critical problems.

With the outbursts of protests and violence in early 2018 are a major indicator that more protests will follow through the year. It is looked as that the Iranian government made a mistake by relying on repression rather than reform. The regime is currently under massive political and social pressure as well as serious economic pressure which makes changes all the more foreseeable. Calls for regime change by the U.S. or any outside state will most likely provoke a reaction that will not be by any means popular.

North Korea, South Korea and the Winter Olympics

Abstract of Reuters

North Korea's participation in the Olympics has been seen as a win for Moon, who hopes to use the event to make a diplomatic breakthrough in the standoff over North Korea's nuclear and missile program. It also eases public concerns that the North might upstage the Games with yet another weapons test.

Quote: "North Korea was all about firing missiles last year, but suddenly they want to come to the South for the Olympics? Who gets to decide that?," Kim Joo-hee, a 24-year-old translator told Reuters during a coffee break on a chilly Seoul afternoon. "Does North Korea have so much privilege to do whatever they want?"

Both North and South Korea will march under a unified flag with a joint hockey team for the 2018 winter Olympics but this has not come without controversy. Outrage by the citizens of South Korea has shown the public are less committed to the idea of a united Korea than past generations. However Moon has taken the participation of North Korea in the Winter Olympics as a win and hopes to use this as a diplomatic breakthrough on a situation that has lasted for 60 years.

Talks between the two countries holds a special significance due to the fact that for the last 4 years there has been no communication between governments. With North Korea developing long range missiles, this step forward brings ease to much of the world and heightens hope for negotiations with UN to go through.

China and Cryptocurrency

Abstract of Bloomberg News

It has been talked about for a long time that China has been looking into clamping down on cryptocurrency trading. We recently saw the effect of this with the correction on January 17th. While authorities placed a ban on cryptocurrency exchanges last year much of the population have found loopholes to get around law enforcement. The new move by China is to target individuals and companies that provide market making, settlement and clearing services for centralized trading.

The reason for China's recent action would be the concerns over excessive speculation, money laundering and tax evasion. Up until last year China had the most active market for exchanges but even with companies and the consumer looking elsewhere for trading the effort by authorities has made a limited impact. China's Central Bank, as well as the local authorities, are calling for an end to the booming industry. With the action of the China Central Bank many other countries are following in their footprints and are calling for a regulation at an "International Level".

What does this mean for us?

Currently there is no way for us to tell where the world of cryptocurrency is heading. With a small decrease of Unconfirmed Transactions at the Block chain, fees are still high and with the chains end in sight it might be time to put investment into other coins. The speculation of the current price of Bitcoin is that it is still too high but only time will tell.