

## Headlines:

- **US Willing to Talk to Iran**
- **US Ambassador Confirms US Worked with Russia to Prevent al-Assad Regime Collapse**
- **Trump Visits UK**

## Details:

### US Willing to Talk to Iran

After weeks of sober rattling US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has said that the US is willing to hold talks with Iran without any preconditions on June 2. Pompeo has previously demanded 12 points as preconditions for talks, including ending its ballistic missile program and support for proxy groups in the Middle East, in addition to a permanent halt to its nuclear program. This comes on the back of President Donald Trump asking Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to arrange discussions with Tehran. One would hope Iran has learnt its lesson now from negotiating with the US, as although Iran is willing to negotiate over its atomic program, it might avoid such a meeting given the White House's track record of altering the scope of talks with other countries, such as Mexico.

### US Ambassador Confirms US Worked with Russia to Prevent al-Assad Regime Collapse

Underreported in the news, former senior Pentagon official Andrew Exum, the Deputy Secretary of Defence for Middle East Policy under the Obama administration, provided [candid testimony](#) to the Congressional Committee of Foreign Affairs on America's strategic orientation vis-a-vis the Middle East. It also clarified a number of issues related to American involvement in Syria, most notably, that the Obama administration effectively cooperated with the Kremlin in order to avoid the total collapse of the Assad regime in Syria. The US approach in Syria has been labelled as a 'failure' a 'strategic blunder' and a sign of the continued erosion of American influence in the region. One particularly oft repeated narrative is that the US lost the strategic initiative to Russia in 2015, and was subsequently prevented from taking any decisive action. Exum explained *"for much of 2016, the U.S. government engaged in a lengthy series of negotiations with the Russian military and intelligence services over the fate of Syria."* In his testimony Exum further highlighted: *"we worried that the Assad Regime might finally collapse – and do so quickly, in a way that would endanger U.S. interests, to include the security of the state of Israel."* The Assad regime in Syria, in both its Hafiz and Bashar iterations, has represented a strategic known quantity, particularly for Israel. Thus, the US kept the regime alive for this purpose.

### Trump Visits UK

US Presidents Donald Trump visit to the UK was given all the usual pomp and ceremony and much media coverage. Britain rolled out the red carpet for the US president, who spent the second day of his trip to the UK with outgoing Prime Minister Theresa May. Trump's trip focused on enlisting London in his escalating trade war with China. With the powerless prime minister set to step down just days after the state visit is concluded, Trump is well-positioned to take advantage of the so-called *"special relationship"* between the two nations as he lobbies Washington's allies to get on board with his trade war against China. It remains to be seen if the UK could give up such a good opportunity to undermine the US by siding with China, which will include significant investment by the Chinese into the UK's 5G infrastructure.