

On Tuesday, Americans in the East Coast were the first to take to polling stations to vote in the Mid Terms, the elections that will determine all 345 seats in the House of Representatives and 35 of 100 seats in the Senate, as well as governor posts (in 36 out of 50 states) and seats in state legislatures. According to pollsters, the Democrats are very likely to secure the 23 seats required to take over the House of Representatives but are expected to fall short of the two seats the party would need to win control of the Senate.

The outcome of this electoral round could have important implications for the Arab Gulf states. Despite the peculiar style and some occasional outbursts from the president on specific issues – for example Saudi oil production – the Trump presidency has largely meant good news for Washington’s Gulf allies. Among other issues, the Trump administration has addressed widespread regional concerns about Iran’s aggressive regional policies. It has unilaterally withdrawn from the nuclear deal between Iran and the P5+1, re-imposed sanctions on Iran’s energy and financial industries and vowed to contain Iranian expansionism in Syria or Yemen.

US Foreign policy is the remit of the presidency and Mid Terms have historically had little to no impact when it comes to changes in US foreign policy in general and toward the Middle East. However, obtaining a majority in the House of Representatives – as is expected – would give the Democrats the chairmanship of committees that are relevant for US foreign policy, namely Foreign Affairs, Intelligence and Armed Services.

The Democratic majority in the House would offer the Democrats the option to oppose secondary Iran sanctions that affect US allies. While European governments have vowed to look for ways to compensate Iran for the re-imposition of US sanctions, European companies have been reluctant to follow their governments’ advice and deal with Iran, under the fear of undermining their presence in the US and falling under the radar of US sanctions.

A particular issue that will most likely feature in the agenda of the Democrats is greater scrutiny of the US involvement in the Yemen war in support of the military actions of the Arab coalition against the Iran-backed Houthis. A move to further restrict US involvement or even halt it altogether could quickly gather pace, specially in a context when key members of the Trump administration are already calling for a ceasefire and the resumption of the stalled peace process, despite the Houthis continuous ballistic missile attacks on civilian targets inside Saudi Arabia.

Internal politics after the Mid Terms could yet be the source of the most consequential changes, with deep impact on US foreign policy. With the investigation led by Special Counsel Robert Mueller under way, the attempt to impeach the president could gain traction with a Democratic majority in the House.

A push to the left within the Democratic party following the Mid Terms, namely from the House's powerful Congressional Progressive Caucus established by senator and former presidential candidate Bernie Sanders, is a plausible scenario. The further to the left the Democratic party turns, the greater the chance that critical views of US ties with the GCC states will predominate.

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