

Trump's Withdrawal from the Iran Nuclear Deal and Its Nefarious Consequences

by Dr. Ali Fathollah-Nejad - 03/10/2018 13:02



The article was published first on 18.07.2018 on The Region and the piece was [republished](#) & [translated into Arabic](#) by the Brookings Doha Center.

The Donald Trump Administration's willful withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), and his announcement of U.S. nuclear-related sanctions to be reinstated within three and six months has brought this multilateral agreement to the brink of collapse. In exchange for sanctions relief, the JCPOA curbed Iran's nuclear program, thus putting a temporary halt to a decade-long crisis that was prone to military escalation.

Despite efforts from the European Union, France, Germany, the UK (or the EU/E3), and Iran, the future of the JCPOA is on shaky grounds. Economic relations between the EU and Iran need to be shielded, if the agreement is to be saved. Only through a robust political and legal effort can the EU achieve that, which in turn would convince Tehran to stay in the deal. But even if Europe would muster unprecedented political

courage and stamina vis-à-vis Washington, such efforts to keep the deal afloat might fail given European companies' *de facto* angst over potential U.S. punishment.

The decision by U.S. President Trump has negative ramifications on all conceivable fronts:

Internationally, it massively weakens multilateral diplomatic efforts towards negotiating – and preserving – non-proliferation agreements. The negotiations over North Korea's nuclear weapons are a case in point. Moreover, the move tarnished the standing of the U.S. in the international system, first by undermining its credibility as a reliable partner to international agreements – after all, Iran complied to its side of the bargain, as continuously certified by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The U.S. pullout also casts a dark shadow over the future of transatlantic cooperation over vital international security issues, exacerbated by Trump duping the heads of government of Washington's main European allies in their last-minute pleas to save the deal.

Regionally, it allows Iran to leave the deal and to revitalize its nuclear program, thus unleashing a nuclear arms race in the Middle East with unpredictable and dangerous consequences. The crisis over Iran's nuclear program could re-emerge, opening the possibility of military confrontation over it. In addition, a collapse of the deal, which emboldens Iran's hardliners, could result in a more unfettered regional policies which they command over.

Domestically, the deal's collapse would play into the hands of Iran's hardliners whose shadow economic empires can flourish again under sanctions, while the authoritarian state can extend its power over society. Trump's decision couldn't have come at a historically more sensitive time, precisely when the Islamic Republic had begun to reel given ongoing protests over the last weeks and months. Iranians' political activism will more easily face state repression as it would be portrayed as serving an alleged U.S. "regime change" agenda. [Iran's hardline and highly politicized judiciary has already announced](#) that "Judicial and security bodies ... will resolutely confront any group or individual that wants to compromise the country's security," portraying young protesters as "counterrevolutionaries fooled by the U.S. and Israeli enemies' psychological warfare." In other words, the President's and his Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's rhetoric of "regime change" is a godsend for Tehran's repressive apparatus at a time when protests and strikes occur on a daily basis.

As a result, on all these fronts the likely repercussions are the opposite of what Trump's move allegedly intends to accomplish.