

By Sabotaging the Iran Deal, Donald Trump Certifies US Irrelevance

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Global Research, October 25, 2017

Region: [Middle East & North Africa, USA](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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On January 16, 2016, the [Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action](#) (JCPOA) entered into force following four years of negotiations between Iran, the European Union, Russia, China, and the United States. Shortly after implementing the agreement, the US Congress put into place a quarterly mechanism to address any failure by the Islamic Republic of Iran to comply with the negotiations, signed through a resolution of the United Nations Security Council. The intent was to leave a margin of manoeuvre for the US administration, especially to be employed for domestic propaganda, but which ultimately would allow for the United States' unilateral annulment of the agreement. It is in the end a mechanism with little political weight, given that the US reserves its exclusive right to scuttle it at any time. For the rest of the world, on the other hand, the visits of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) are a sufficient guarantee of Iran's compliance with the agreements.

Trump's decision to annul the deal paves the way for Congress (within sixty days) to create new conditions that were not negotiated on for the JCPOA among the six parties. In particular, the goal of the White House is to force Congress to include two points in the new agreement, which concern: the banning of the production and testing ballistic missiles; and the designation of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Hezbollah as terrorist organizations, thereby labelling Tehran as a financier of "terrorism" in the region.

Trump's intentions are obviously to achieve a consensus amongst American neoconservatives, Israeli friends, and the Saudi lobby, as well as to reverse Obama's foreign-policy legacy.

The danger of Trump's actions are countless, as evident in the reaction of America's European allies. Macron, Merkel and May have confirmed that they intend to stick with the agreement. The White House plans to work with Congress to work out a number of new points, with the European allies to be forced to sign a new deal for the JCPOA. Legally this new agreement has no effect on the original JCPOA, as it has not been acceded to by Iran, China and Russia. Nevertheless, the White House's tactics are clear, namely, to oblige the Europeans, under the threat the US unilaterally withdrawing from the JCPOA, to agree to the new deal. Washington wants the Europeans standing alongside it, to provide Iran, China, and Russia with a *fait accompli* and forcing the latter to appear to be the ones responsible for collapsing the deal if they fail to comply.

Unhelpful strategy

Trump is putting pressure on Congress to draft a legislative strategy while ignoring the needs of the Europeans to work with Iran in order to diversify their energy sources and enter what is potentially a rich market.

Trump's move is undoubtedly welcomed by two of America's allies long unhappy with Washington's signing of the JCPOA. Tel Aviv and Riyadh have commented on the decision to put the Iranian nuclear agreement under scrutiny with a sense of jubilation. Netanyahu and King Salman have been lobbying Washington for years not to sign such a deal, and since the signing of the JCPOA, have been urging Washington to rescind it. Their efforts seem to have finally paid off. (It seems that the Saudi purchase of \$110 billion worth of weapons helped, as well as Trump's support for AIPAC, the pro-Israel lobby, during his election campaign).

Trump also seems to want to test Congress, which is always ready to sabotage his domestic plans. Likewise, the scuttling of the Iran deal lays the groundwork for a war that his generals have been speaking about for years. Without having to search too much for complex explanations, Trump seems to want to immediately please his friends while also testing his biggest critics, all important components of the deep state. Trump strives to please his financial backers while at the same time attempting to score points with Congress in order to enable him to implement his domestic policy, which involve such things as tax and health reform, two critical issues for his re-election run in 2020.

One of the most immediate negative effects for the United States renegeing on the Iran deal is the perception that Washington does not abide by the agreements of previous administrations. The message sent to the rest of the world is that the United States is unreliable, compounded by the marked ideological divisions between Democrats and Republicans. The need for Trump to dismiss Obama's every success has culminated in the reversal of the Iran nuclear deal. One of the few US diplomatic actions of great significance has collapsed under the lobbying pressure of the Saudi, Israeli and neoconservative lobbies.

This decision sends a clear message to many countries. North Korea will hardly feel confident entering into negotiations with the United States given that Washington does not appear to keep its word from one administration to the next. The consequences of this decision in Asia is to side-line Washington and exclude it from playing a role in finding a diplomatic solution to the crisis on the Korean peninsula, leaving it to actors like Beijing, Seoul, Moscow, Tokyo and Pyongyang.

Likewise, the hopes of involving Washington in a post-conflict agreement on Syria, based on the Geneva peace talks on Syria, have diminished. Astana's agreements between Ankara, Tehran and Moscow seem to offer the example for resolving conflicts. Once again, the United States remains on the margins of the decision making process in two important regions, the Middle East and Asia.

Trump is probably convinced that he has brought about a miracle, reassuring his two main allies in the region, while dampening internal criticism and providing for himself an opening to implement domestic reforms, which are crucial for his re-election.

Squeezing the Allies

Since Trump's electoral victory, it has become clear that the US administration considers the role played by its European allies to be marginal if not irrelevant. The first evidence of this was seen in the pressure on European capitals to pay the full NATO military budget; then

the expressed intention to sell American LNG (priced out of market) to European partners; and now a new escalation of tensions with Iran. The enormous pressure that Congress, together with the Saudi and Israeli lobbies, will bring to bear on France, Britain and Germany to cooperate with the new regulations concerning the JCPOA, could strain the relationship between the old continent and the United States as never before.

It is likely that for reasons of economic interest as well as common sense, the vast majority of European companies will decide not to work with the Islamic Republic of Iran, either because of US sanctions or because of a failure of the JCPOA. In the long run, Trump is forcing America's historic allies to find a way out of such harmful sanctions as those placed on Russia or, in the future, Iran.

The alternative global economic/financial system, which entails de-dollarization, does not yet have strong European participation. However, with situations that are less and less favourable to the old continent, Europeans will need to recognize the necessity of diversifying their foreign policy, ensuring that it does not always automatically line itself up behind Washington. Trump's decision to abandon the JCPOA may spur the Europeans to fashion an Iran deal that is to the benefit of all stakeholders and helps guarantee lasting peace in the region.

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