

JCPOA Nuclear Agreement Collapsing Due to Western Bad Faith

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In spite of the Russian Foreign Ministry's best efforts, the JCPOA may very well be in the process of collapsing. On January 14th, British, French and German officials decided to trigger the agreement's Dispute Resolution Mechanism in relation to alleged Iranian non-compliance with its obligations under the deal, a move which the Russian and Chinese governments' view as unhelpful. For its own part, Iran has also criticized European signatories' non-compliance with their own economic obligations under the JCPOA, regarding the un-freezing of Iranian assets, etc.

A Russian Foreign Ministry statement released on January 24th stated

“For our part, we would like to confirm the existence of substantial difficulties created by the E3's decision. Their step creates additional problems and challenges in the implementation of the JCPOA. Besides, the above-mentioned mechanism cannot be put into effect due to the absence of the necessary procedures and the Joint Commission's decisions.”

On January 28th, a Russian Foreign Ministry official stated that Russia was strongly opposed to any re-imposition of sanctions on Iran, and that Iran could count on Russia's support in the matter. Since January 14th, British, French and German officials have urged the Russian and Chinese governments to participate in the Dispute Resolution Mechanism.

In alleging Iranian non-compliance, the JCPOA's European signatories overlook the point that the Iranian government has clearly and repeatedly stated that it would implement a phased suspension of its commitments under the JCPOA until such a time as the deal's other signatories came into full compliance. For example, on September 29th last year, the International Atomic Energy Agency confirmed that Iran has been enriching uranium to a purity of 4.35%, which marginally exceeds the limit of 3.67% stipulated under the terms of the JCPOA, and Iran has exceeded the limit of 300 kilograms of stockpiled nuclear fuel which is permitted under the terms of the deal. The Iranian explanation of its step back from these commitments has been clear and consistent – Iran cannot meet all of its obligations under the deal while the other signatories refuse to do so.

Admittedly, **the decision by the United States to unilaterally withdraw from the JCPOA and re-impose sanctions on Iran in May 2018 has made it difficult for European signatories to come into full compliance**, as the un-freezing of Iranian assets in European countries and the full enabling of trade with Iran would make European financial institutions themselves secondary targets for US sanctions. The crucial point is that

all dollar-denominated transactions worldwide technically come under US legal jurisdiction. However, the Iranian government can hardly be held responsible for this lack of resolve and geo-political weakness on the part of the deal's European signatories.

The tactical oscillation of the German government, in particular, has a destabilizing effect. During Chancellor Merkel's meeting with President Putin in Moscow on January 11th, both leaders re-stated their commitment to saving the JCPOA at all costs. They also jointly confirmed that the Nord Stream 2 project would go ahead in spite of US sanctions.

3 days later, German, French and British diplomats trigger the Dispute Resolution Mechanism, throwing the entire future of the JCPOA into serious doubt.

Only 12 days after Merkel's highly productive meeting with Putin, the largest NATO military exercises held in Europe for 25 years take place, highly concentrated on German territory but focusing on the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad.

What exactly is Merkel trying to achieve here?

One usually associates these kinds of cheap moves and this kind of obsessively short-termist tactical oscillation with Erdogan.

What kind of advantage can Merkel hope might accrue to Germany through such a demonstration of bad faith? Maybe she just wanted to put Nord Stream 2 in her pocket before she left Moscow.

This kind of non-stop geo-political flip-flopping serves as a partial explanation as to why no western European nation-state, not even the EU hegemon, has any meaningful level of geo-political reach. Due to the infantilization of Europe's political class, they are simply incapable of formulating or maintaining a consistent policy on external relations. Playing your suitors off against each other and sending new mixed signals every 5 minutes is not a policy. It's a symptom of incoherence and strategic impotence.

For the first time on January 22nd, the Iranian side began to openly discuss outright withdrawal from the JCPOA rather than mere suspension of some of its commitments under the agreement. The Iranian Presidential Chief of Staff Mahmoud Vaezi raised this possibility as a for-instance. His preparedness to do so explicitly was a strong signal that Tehran has finally begun to lose patience with her western partners, and that the JCPOA may very well be in its death-spiral. This breakdown in trust simply may not be redeemable.

We should bear in mind that the central issue with regard to Iran's nuclear program has never been the possibility of Iran developing nuclear weapons capability. The thing which has worried both the United States and the western European powers most is simply that Iran might build a more technologically modern and efficient economy. The Iranian government has consistently stated that its only motivation for pursuing its nuclear program is that gasoline is too valuable to be used for domestic electricity-production.

The western alliance fears Iran's endeavours toward economic and technological self-strengthening. They see it as more desirable to keep Iran in a state of economic dependency, as an under-developed natural resource colony. Sanctions today serve precisely the same strategic purpose which the combination of tariffs-regimes and gunboat-diplomacy did during the 19th century, to maintain one-sided economic relationships. With

that in mind, we have to ponder the question as to whether the JCPOA's European signatories are simply demonstrating extreme weakness and lack of resolve in the face of American economic coercion, or if they simply never entered into the JCPOA in good faith in the first place.

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