

# The U.S. Is Playing with Fire if It Walks Away from the Iran Nuclear Deal on May 12

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*A foreign policy crisis is coming May 12. President Donald Trump's likely decision on that day to not continue waiving sanctions on Iran under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action will significantly increase the chances of war.*

The 2015 [Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action](#) signed by China, Russia, and most of western Europe requires the American president to certify every three months Iran's nuclear program is in compliance with the deal. In return, the next quarter's economic [sanctions](#) are waived against the Islamic Republic. Earlier this year, Trump [warned](#) he was waiving sanctions for the final time, setting a May 12 deadline for significant changes in the agreement to be made. Failing those changes, Trump's non-signature would trigger sanctions to snap into place.

The [changes](#) Trump is insisting on — reduce Iran's ballistic missile capability, renegotiate the deal's end date, and allow unrestricted inspections — are designed to force failure.

Iran's ballistic missile program was purposefully never part of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action; as learned during the Cold War, trying to throw every problem into the same pot assured no agreement could ever be reached. Trump trying to add the missile program in three years after the agreement was signed is wholly outside the norms of diplomacy (and the art of dealmaking.) Ballistic missile capability lies at the heart of Iran's defense. Sanctions have already kept the country from fielding any significant air force, and memories in Tehran of Iraqi air strikes on its cities in the 1980s when Iran lacked retaliatory capability lie deep. The missile program is the cornerstone of Iranian [self-preservation](#) and thus understood to be non-negotiable.

The 2030 agreement end date is to the Trump administration a ticking time bomb; Iran will nefariously lie in wait, springing whole into nuclear status 12 years from now. Leaving aside the original agreement was negotiated with such a deadline, and American policy has generally been for presidents to honor agreements in place as they take office, the worry over an Iran of the future going nuclear is pure drama.

Twelve years is a lifetime in the Middle East. Some 12 years ago Syria was at peace with its neighbors, and the United States happy to outsource torture to Assad as part of the War on Terror. Turkey was a democracy, Russia mostly a non-player in the region, and Iran was timidly facing the American military on two of its borders, open to broad negotiations with Washington. There is more than enough to focus on in the Middle East of 2018 than what

the area might look like strategically in 2030, even assuming Iran could surreptitiously keep its nuclear development going such to pop out of the cake in 12 years with a nuclear surprise. Washington's demand for an indefinite extension of limits on Iran's nuclear activities is political theatre.

As for the concern Iran is not compliant with the agreement, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the United Nations body charged with monitoring the deal, has presented no such evidence. Iran has in fact shown itself anxious to stay in compliance; in two past minor instances where the Agency noted Iran exceeded its heavy water limits, Tehran [immediately](#) disposed of the excessive amount. Trump has suggested he wants unprecedented [access](#) to any and all Iranian sites, including military sites not known to be part of any nuclear program. The United States never allowed carte blanche to the Soviets during the Cold War, no nation with the power to say no would. Following the inspections ahead of the 2003 American invasion of Iraq, where intelligence officers were embedded in the process and the results politicized, American credibility for this ask is low.

So these aren't really negotiating points, they're excuses for the United States itself to step out of compliance with an agreement.

“President Trump appears to have presented the [Europeans] with a false choice: either kill the deal with me, or I'll kill it alone,” [said](#) Rob Malley, a senior American negotiator of the deal, and now head of the International Crisis Group.

None of this is a surprise. Trump has always wanted out of what he [calls](#) the “worst deal ever.” His new foreign policy team — Secretary of State nominee Mike Pompeo and National Security Advisor John Bolton — are also ardent opponents. While anything can happen inside a White House fueled by chaos, there is no plausible scenario that says the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action will survive May 12. What happens next?

The likely effects of walking away from the agreement are global. Iran may immediately kick start its nuclear program. Tehran's hegemonic efforts in Iraq, Yemen, Lebanon, and Syria would remain untouched if not intensify in retaliation. Iran's current missiles will still be able to reach Jerusalem and Riyadh. The odds of the North Koreans agreeing to a nuclear deal decrease; imagine being the new State Department envoy sitting across from an experienced North Korean diplomat trying to answer his question “What is to say you won't do this to us in three years?”

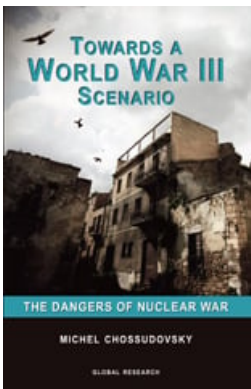
European allies will be reluctant to join in future diplomatic heavy lifting in the Middle East or elsewhere, shy to commit only to see the Americans turn up their noses following another election. Relations could easily sink to the level of 2003, when America's bullheaded invasion of Iraq split the alliance. Russia and China, signatories to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, will have a chance at being the “good guys,” seizing an opening to expand cooperation with Iran at a time when American diplomacy might instead be looking for ways to drive wedges among them.

Meanwhile, the impact of renewed sanctions may be quite limited strategically. It is unclear if American pique will be followed by all of Europe falling into line with re-imposed sanctions; there is a lot of money in doing business in Iran and absent unambiguous proof Iran violated the agreement it is hard to see them going along in earnest. It is even less clear Russia and

China will follow the new sanctions regime. And even if some signatories agree to reimpose sanctions, there is little to suggest Iran's ambitions have been severely thwarted by decades of sanctions anyway. Had they been fully effective, there'd have been no need for the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action in the first place.

Without the agreement, there is, to misquote Churchill, nothing left to "jaw jaw," leaving Iran free to develop its weapons and America only the option of destroying them. It's perhaps the dangerous scenario Washington, encouraged by an Israel who has sought the destruction of Iran's nuclear facilities for years, wants. The Israeli air strikes which decimated [Saddam's](#) nuclear program and [Syria's](#) were small scale, directed against nearby, discrete targets, vulnerable above ground. Not so for Iran, whose nuclear facilities are far away, dispersed, underground, and protected by both a decent air defense system and a credible threat of conventional, terrorist, cyber, and/or chemical retaliation. And that's all before the newly-emboldened Russians weigh in.

The chance of terminating Iran's nuclear program is held against the risk of full-on war in the region. The United States is playing with real fire if it walks away from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on May 12.



["Towards a World War III Scenario: The Dangers of Nuclear War"](#)

by Michel Chossudovsky

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[Michel Chossudovsky](#) is Professor of Economics at the University of Ottawa and Director of the Centre for Research on Globalization (CRG), which hosts the critically acclaimed website [www.globalresearch.ca](http://www.globalresearch.ca). He is a contributor to the Encyclopedia Britannica. His writings have been translated into more than 20 languages.

Reviews

"This book is a 'must' resource - a richly documented and systematic diagnosis of the supremely pathological geo-strategic planning of US wars since '9-11' against non-nuclear countries to seize their oil fields and resources under cover of 'freedom and democracy'."

*-John McMurtry, Professor of Philosophy, Guelph University*

“In a world where engineered, pre-emptive, or more fashionably “humanitarian” wars of aggression have become the norm, this challenging book may be our final wake-up call.”

*-Denis Halliday, Former Assistant Secretary General of the United Nations*

Michel Chossudovsky exposes the insanity of our privatized war machine. Iran is being targeted with nuclear weapons as part of a war agenda built on distortions and lies for the purpose of private profit. The real aims are oil, financial hegemony and global control. The price could be nuclear holocaust. When weapons become the hottest export of the world’s only superpower, and diplomats work as salesmen for the defense industry, the whole world is recklessly endangered. If we must have a military, it belongs entirely in the public sector. No one should profit from mass death and destruction.

*-Ellen Brown, author of ‘Web of Debt’ and president of the Public Banking Institute*



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