

The United States “Withdrawal” from the Iran Nuclear Deal under Donald Trump

Nawaz Ahmad Teli
PhD Research Scholar
Department of Political Science
Vikram University Ujjain (MP)
haqnawazphd@gmail.com

Abstract

On July 14, 2015, the P5+1 (China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States), the European Union (EU), and Iran reached a Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) to make sure exclusive peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was an end product of 20 months of intense arbitration resulting in an understanding between P5+1 countries and Iran. The agreement of the JCPOA was publicized, bringing to a successful conclusion almost two years of negotiations, and seeming to bring to an end a period of international tension relating Iran's nuclear program that had been ongoing since 2002, and that had at times appeared likely to result in war. It aims at preventing Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon capability and make possible to Iran to restart normal relations with the world by lifting bilateral and multilateral sanctions. Under the agreement, Iran agreed that “under no conditions will Iran ever seek, develop or acquire any nuclear weapons.” Iran also permitted a strict monitoring regime, allowing international inspectors to gain access to sites suspected of nuclear weapons-related activities. Former US President Barak Obama, who played an important role in negotiations, argued “this deal will make America and the world safer and more secure. ON 8 May, 2018, US President Donald Trump decided to “withdraw” the US from the JCPOA, and to re-impose the economic sanctions on Iran that had been lifted under the deal. This put the US in violation of its obligations under the agreement, and thus represents a unilateral American withdrawal from the deal. The Iran deal as Trump expressed is defective to its core and calling it decaying and rotten. Despite the Trump administration's decision to withdraw from it and re-impose U.S sanctions, Iran has continued to abide by the 2015 nuclear deal. The paper also examines the reasons for the pull-out of the United States from the JCPOA under the Donald Trump administration.

Keywords: Iran, Nuclear deal, US withdrawal, Donald Trump, JCPOA

Introduction: Iran and several world super-powers, including the United States, signed a historic nuclear agreement over the summer of 2015. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action [hereinafter “Agreement”] was signed on July 14, 2015 in Vienna by the United States, Great Britain, France, Germany, China, Russia, the European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and Iran.¹ It is over one hundred pages long and has five annexes; some commentators have indicated that the level of minutia and detail in this agreement is unprecedented in terms of other nuclear nonproliferation agreements throughout history.² Under the terms of the Agreement, Iran agreed to curb its nuclear program in exchange for the lifting of United Nations-imposed sanctions against Iran.³ The so-called Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) saw Iran agree to

limit the size of its stockpile of enriched uranium - which is used to make reactor fuel, but also nuclear weapons - for 15 years and the number of centrifuges installed to enrich uranium for 10 years. Iran also agreed to modify a heavy water facility so it could not produce plutonium suitable for a bomb. In return, sanctions imposed by the UN, US and EU that had crippled Iran's economy were lifted.⁴ The deal was reached to ensure Iran's nuclear programme will be "exclusively peaceful". The White House said that with the "unprecedented monitoring and access this deal puts in place, if Iran tries to develop nuclear weapons, we will know and sanctions will snap back into place." This deal has been viewed as the key foreign policy achievement of Barrack Obama's administration.⁵

US withdraw from Iran nuclear deal:

By January 16, 2016, the date by which all sides had successfully implemented their initial commitments pursuant to the JCPOA, there seemed to be ample cause for optimism that the JCPOA would in fact fulfill its purpose of reducing international tension over Iran's nuclear program, and through a carefully negotiated and reciprocal exchange of commitments allow all the parties thereto to achieve their core aims.⁶

On May 8, 2018, President Trump announced his decision to end U.S. participation in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action ("JCPOA") and re-impose sanctions against Iran that had been suspended as part of this 2015 nuclear agreement between the United States, Iran, and certain other governments.⁷ Thus constitutes a unilateral American withdrawal from the deal and put the US in violation of its obligations under the agreement.⁸ Iran's President Hassan Rouhani responded in a speech to the nation that Tehran would, for now, remain within the accord, and would negotiate with Russia and China- "the world's two super powers"- on a path forward. But he said that Iran would prepare to resume uranium enrichment as a contingency. "Iran is a country that adheres to its commitments," Rouhani said, "and the US is a country that has never adhered to its commitments."

Israeli government officials exalted the decision. "Israel thanks President Trump for his courageous decision," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated in a speech following Trump's announcement, calling his decision historic.⁹ France, Germany and the UK - whose leaders had tried to change Mr. Trump's mind - have said they "regret" the American decision. The foreign ministry of Russia, another signatory, said it was "deeply disappointed". The European Union's top diplomat, Federica Mogherini, said the EU was "determined to preserve" the deal. Former President Obama said on Facebook that the deal was working and was in US interests.¹⁰ The Trump administration has repeatedly warned European multinationals they will face swingeing US Treasury fines if they trade with Iran and try to operate in the US market. Almost all large European firms have withdrawn from the Iranian market, depressing the economy still further. Washington has extended sweeping sanctions on Tehran and recently has hit even harder, moving to ban all countries from buying Iran's oil, its top export. UN inspectors say Iran has remained in compliance with the nuclear deal, which is still backed by European powers as well as Democrats seeking to unseat Trump next year.¹¹ On May 2019, Iran suspended commitments under the agreement and gave the other signatories a 60 day deadline to protect it from US sanctions, otherwise it said it would resume production of highly enriched uranium. Global nuclear watchdog the IAEA says Iran has already increased production of enriched uranium-but it is not known by how much.¹²

Why US withdraw from the Iran nuclear deal:

US President Donald Trump has fulfilled an election campaign promise to pull out of the landmark 2015 nuclear deal agreed between Iran and world powers, an agreement former Secretary of State John Kerry said “made the world safer place”. Mr. Trump said the Obama legislation would be scrapped calling the deal “decaying and rotten”. The US will “not be held hostage to nuclear blackmail” or allow “a regime that chants “Death to America” to gain nuclear weapons, he said from the White House in a long-expected announcement.¹³ He said the deal was “an embarrassment” to him “as a citizen”.¹⁴ Trump had delayed his decision to withdraw from the deal for almost a year and a half in part because Tillerson, McMaster, and Mattis had urged its continuation in order to maintain the freeze on Iran’s nuclear weapon program for at least another dozen years. But with the departure of Tillerson and McMaster, and their replacement by the more hawkish Pompeo and Bolton, Trump faced less internal resistance to the move.

Conclusion:

No doubt, Trump also was eager to tear up Obama’s proudest foreign policy achievement. He already had withdrawn from his predecessor’s TPP and his Paris Climate Agreement. The Iran nuclear deal was just the latest of Obama’s achievements to be disassembled by his successor. However, Trump said he was prepared to negotiate an entirely new agreement with the Iranians, rather than try to make improvements in Obama’s nuclear deal. He even predicted that the Iranians would be rushing back to the table begging for a new deal, one that would be much better for the United States than the one signed by Obama.¹⁵

References:

1. Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, U.S. Dep’t of State (July 14, 2015), <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/245317.pdf> [<http://perma.cc/9DBJ-XEX4>].
2. Mecklin John, The Experts Assess the Iran Agreement of 2015, Bulletin Atomic Scientists, July 14, 2015.
3. Peralta Eyder, 6 Things You Should Know About the Iran Nuclear Deal, NPR, July 14, 2015.
4. Iran nuclear deal, Trump pulls out in break with Europe allies, BBC News, 9 May 2018.
5. The Iran nuclear deal explained, Sky News, 9 May 2019.
6. Joyner Daniel H., United States “Withdrawal” from the Iran Nuclear Deal, E-International Relations, 21 August 2018.
7. United States Ends Participation In Iran Nuclear Deal, Re-imposes Sanctions Against Iran, Covington, 9 May 2018.
8. Beauchamp Zack, Trump’s withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal explained, Vox, 8 May 2018.
9. Wilner Michael, Trump nixes Iran nuclear deal, The Jerusalem Post, 8 May 2018.
10. Iran nuclear deal, Trump pulls out in break with Europe allies, BBC News, 9 May 2018.
11. Wintour Patrick, Iran announces partial withdrawal from nuclear deal, The Guardian, 8 May 2019.

12. Iran nuclear deal: key details, BBC news, 11 June 2019.
13. Mckernan Bethan, Iran nuclear deal: Why has Trump withdrawn US from it and why does it matter?, Independent, 9 May 2018.
14. Iran nuclear deal, Trump pulls out in break with Europe allies, BBC News, 9 May 2018.
15. Powaski Ronald E., Ideals, Interests, and US foreign policy from H.W.Bush to Donald Trump, Palgrave Macmillan, Edition 2019, ISBN 978-3-319-97294-7, P,252