

## America Needs a Diplomacy-Centric Approach to Iran

The Trump administration is planning to de-certify the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) despite Iran's continued verified compliance and the broad consensus that the accord remains in the U.S. national interest. Worse, reports indicate the Administration will leverage decertification to significantly escalate pressure on Iran while failing to engage Iran diplomatically. History has proven that the United States' only successes in changing Iranian behavior have been the result of a diplomatic-centric approach. Eschewing this strategy threatens to weaken and isolate the United States, spark a renewed nuclear crisis, and lead to eventual war.

### Iran's Non-Nuclear Activities Are Unchanged But Far Less Dangerous Under the JCPOA

- According to Lt. Gen. Vincent Stewart, Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, Iran has [directed the preponderance of the money](#) gained from sanctions relief to “economic development and infrastructure.”
- Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Joseph Dunford [indicated](#) in September that “Iran has not changed its malign activity in the region since JCPOA was signed.”
- Iran has continued to undertake ballistic missile testing [at a rate that is consistent with past practices](#). However, thanks to the JCPOA, those missiles cannot be fitted with a nuclear warhead.
- Prior sanctions targeting Iran's missile testing has only resulted in Iran [escalating its program](#). Iran views its missile program as a conventional deterrent vital to its national defense; threats will not change that posture, diplomatic engagement can.
- Unfortunately, the Trump Administration is politicizing the intelligence on this issue. CIA Director Mike Pompeo has cast Iran as “dramatically” increasing its malign activities since the JCPOA was signed. Pompeo, who has a [history of skewing the facts](#) on Iran and is a close political ally of Trump, has been criticized for politicizing his position at the CIA. According to [one official](#), "It's almost as if he can't resist the impulse to be political."

### Undermining the JCPOA is Devastating to U.S. National Security Interests

- Secretary of Defense James Mattis recently [affirmed](#) that staying in the JCPOA is in the national security interest of the United States.
- The JCPOA has rolled back Iran's nuclear program and [subjected](#) it to the “world's most robust nuclear verification regime,” according to IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano.

- The IAEA [gained access](#) to the Parchin military facility as a result of the JCPOA in 2015, and can gain access to any facility in Iran in short order under the JCPOA. [No credible evidence](#) of any malfeasance at Iranian military facilities has emerged to date.
- The IAEA, [the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff](#), [U.S. intelligence](#) and our [European allies](#) all continue to affirm Iran's compliance with the JCPOA.
- If Trump fails to certify the JCPOA despite Iran's compliance and its clear benefits, U.S. credibility will be tarnished, particularly with those states who helped secure the deal and will be critical to any future nuclear diplomacy with North Korea.
- Decertification, even without Congressional sanctions snapback, will poison the well with Iran and our allies. Any efforts to counter Iranian activities will be significantly de-legitimized as part of an attempt to abrogate the nuclear agreement.

### **America Needs a Diplomacy-Centric Approach to Iran**

- There is only one approach that has enhanced U.S. and regional security with Iran: the serious, multilateral negotiations that produced the JCPOA.
- The JCPOA could be a foundation to build upon, but only if the U.S. maintains its credibility by fulfilling its commitments under the accord; undermining and decertifying the accord will close off diplomatic opportunities - with Iran as well as the EU.
- There are numerous tripwires for conflict across the region, including in Syria, Yemen and the Persian Gulf. Yet, there is no existing de-confliction channel and no diplomatic relationship with Iran to prevent a conflict from quickly spiraling out of control.
- A comprehensive American approach towards Iran must:
  - Re-establish U.S. credibility with our international partners and Iran by making it clear that the U.S. will not abrogate the JCPOA, including by certifying the accord and halting the politicization of the IAEA's critical role in verifying Iran's compliance with its obligations.
  - Establish a high-level bilateral channel with Iran to avoid an escalatory spiral and engage Iran on remaining issues of concern, including regional security and detained dual nationals in Iran.
  - Launch comprehensive, multilateral diplomatic efforts with Iran aimed at resolving tensions. Such an approach should be based on a "more for more" approach, meaning the U.S. should propose lifting its remaining sanctions and embargo against Iran.