

America Needs a Diplomacy-Centric Approach to Iran

Trump's decertification: The Trump administration decertified the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) last month despite Iran's continued verified compliance and the broad consensus that the accord remains in the U.S. national interest. The decision to decertify gives Congress 60 days - until December 12th - to introduce legislation under an expedited, filibuster-proof process that would reimpose the sanctions lifted under the nuclear deal - effectively ending U.S. compliance with the 7-party agreement.

What happens now: Under the expedited process Trump triggered, Republicans in Congress can kill the Iran deal with a simple majority vote - meaning no Democrats would need to be brought along. However, while every Republican in Congress publicly opposed the Iran deal, few of them have been willing to kill the agreement outright now that they have the opportunity. Instead, Trump [has called](#) has called for Congress to unilaterally alter the accord by passing legislation that ties sanctions relief to Iran's missile program and makes "all restrictions on Iran's nuclear activity permanent under U.S. law." Such efforts would be a violation of the agreement.

Will Congress pass legislation: Senator Tom Cotton (who authored the infamous letter behind Obama's back to Ayatollah Khamenei during the nuclear talks) and Bob Corker have been [circulating draft legislation](#) to enact Trump's vision. The legislation is not subject to the expedited process - meaning all Senate Republicans and at least 8 Democrats would need to support such a bill. So far, Cotton and Corker have failed to convince any Democrats to get on board.

History has proven that the United States' only successes in changing Iranian behavior have been the result of a diplomacy-centric approach. Eschewing this strategy threatens to weaken and isolate the United States, spark a renewed nuclear crisis, and lead to eventual war.

Trump's Twitter Diplomacy is Making International Engagement Impossible - Particularly with Countries Like Iran

- **The Trump Administration has not engaged in serious diplomatic efforts with Iran. Tweets and outrageous public speeches are not how sensitive diplomacy works.** The Trump administration reportedly decided to attempt to meet with President Rouhani following Trump's provocative speech attacking Iran and North Korea at the United Nations. There did not appear to be any serious plan in place for such an effort.
- **Instead of working with allies and pursuing further diplomacy, Trump has antagonized our partners in Europe by decertifying the deal and undermined moderates in Iran who have supported engagement.**
- **Trump's careless diplomatic freelancing is only doing damage and preventing real diplomatic engagement.** It took the U.S. and Iran 30+ years to engage in real

diplomacy and produce an agreement. This is not a Manhattan real estate deal, this is sensitive international diplomacy and Trump is in over his head.

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- **There is only one approach that has enhanced U.S. and regional security with Iran: the serious, multilateral negotiations that produced the JCPOA.** The Iran nuclear deal was negotiated with our allies in Europe as well as Russia and China – none support Trump reopening the agreement or Congress unilaterally altering it, let alone Iran.
- 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.

The Iran Deal is Working

- **Just like Obamacare, Trump and Republicans claimed they wanted to kill the Iran deal but have no real plan to replace it.** Trump accidentally called the bluff of Iran deal opponents. After years of Republicans claiming the JCPOA was a bad deal and promising on the campaign trail that they would “tear it up”, now that they have the opportunity they are balking because the Iran deal is working and killing it would be devastating to U.S. 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.
- IAEA Director Amano [visited Tehran](#) on October 29, 2017 and again publicly stated that Iran is in compliance with the JCPOA.
- 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.
- Although some lawmakers are concerned about certain sunset provisions, if the U.S. leaves the JCPOA and it disintegrates then everything sunsets immediately.

No, Iran’s “Malign Activities” in the Region Have Not Gotten Worse After the Deal

- 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.
- 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.”

Trump is Taking the U.S. Towards a War Path with Iran

- 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.
 - 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.