



## **The JCPOA One Year after U.S. Withdrawal: A Building Block for Restoring U.S. World Leadership and National Security**

*May 2019*

**The agreement to prevent an Iranian nuclear weapon (the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action or JCPOA) is an essential building block for restoring vital U.S. national security interests and commitments to allies.** An American president should put in place this building block expeditiously. The U.S. unilateral withdrawal from the JCPOA on May 8, 2018 significantly undermines America's national security and is fueling momentum for a possible new conflict in the Middle East. If Iran also withdraws from the JCPOA, or from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), the Trans-Atlantic alliance will be dealt a severe blow and a Middle Eastern nuclear arms race could ensue.

### **Withdrawal from the JCPOA damaged U.S. national security.**

- **The U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA undermines America's leadership and stature around the world. It raises the question whether the U.S. can be counted on to comply with international agreements.** It signifies abandonment of U.S. participation in a groundbreaking international step toward the nonproliferation of nuclear weapons. Aggressive use of sanctions raises the specter of longer term damage to the power of the U.S. dollar and Treasury.
- **Rejection of the JCPOA and heavy new sanctions on Iran, further weakens U.S. relations with its allies, which have remained committed to the agreement to assure that Iran will not get a nuclear weapon.**

### **Will the JCPOA survive another year?**

- **Iran's leaders are seeking ways, short of withdrawing from the JCPOA, to respond to U.S. sanctions against European and world trade and investment with Iran. Iran's alternatives, however, are limited.** Despite strong European government support for the JCPOA, private corporations have chosen not to confront the U.S. on sanctions, thereby depriving Iran of the economic benefits that had been crucial to the agreement to severely limit its nuclear program. Iran has been trying to outlast the current U.S. administration, despite the mounting threats of violence and ever tighter economic restrictions, particularly on Iran's exports of oil.
- **The U.S. administration, supported by Israel, Saudi Arabia, and a few Gulf states, have set a goal of destabilizing Iran's government, which in turn may have the effect of driving Iran into even more radical and hostile acts before the U.S. 2020 elections.** Increasingly, the administration's public comments point in this direction. U.S. "maximum pressure" and threats against Iran make clear the objective of the administration's policy is to bring down the regime in Tehran by provoking national unrest and destabilizing internal disorder in the country. Heightened U.S. actions against Iran could lead to the collapse of the JCPOA and provide the administration with a ready excuse for military conflict with Iran.

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- **Iran's withdrawal from the JCPOA would be a perilous game changer for U.S. national security. In addition to setting the stage for war, it could spark a proliferation of nuclear weapons and, according to many Europeans, deal a severe blow to the Trans-Atlantic Alliance and would also further erode U.S. relations with Russia and China.** Iran's leaders are aware they have the power to further isolate the U.S. but so far have not considered it in their own security interests to use it.

**U.S. re-entry to the JCPOA will require diplomacy and resolve.**

- **For the U.S. to re-enter the JCPOA all the original parties – (except the U.S.) China, France, Iran, Germany, Russia, and the United Kingdom – will have to agree on the means to accomplish it.** There is no provision in the agreement for an exit from the JCPOA by any party nor any provision for re-entry.
- **For re-entry, the original JCPOA members will want to know whether the U.S. will accept all of its obligations under the agreement: does the U.S. intend to lift all U.S. secondary sanctions; will the U.S. cease stringent sanctions on oil exports; and will the U.S. comply with all of the JCPOA provisions.**

**Continue to counter severe non-nuclear threats from Iran.**

- **Re-entry will not eliminate or reduce the mounting non-nuclear challenges and threats from Iran. The JCPOA was never designed to address these other actions from Iran.** The JCPOA was negotiated by seven nations to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon, with the realization that an Iran with a nuclear weapon would be far more dangerous than Iran without one.
- **Re-entry will provide the opportunity to rebuild the strong alliance of states that pressured Iran to the negotiating table over its nuclear program.** Outside of the JCPOA, the U.S. is now deprived of allies to pursue diplomatic and coercive measures to confront Iran's growing ballistic missiles program, its support for Hezbollah and Houthi proxy forces, its threats against Israel, and its troubling interference in Syria and elsewhere in the region.
- **Re-entry will also make possible a U.S. channel of communication with the Iranian government when necessary. No political or diplomatic solution to conflicts in the region will be possible without Iran.** Iran's pivotal role cannot be sidelined or ignored. Establishing some channel of communication with the Iranian government will be a requirement of a renewed American leadership role in the region.

**Mending the distrust and repairing the damage caused by the U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA is a daunting task. Reaching agreement on U.S. reinstatement as a full member of the JCPOA is the essential first step.** It would send a powerful signal to the world that the U.S. is ready once again to become a trusted partner and a nation that seeks the peaceful resolution of disputes and conflicts. All Americans, whatever their politics, should give serious thought to these issues. How we handle them will have a critical impact on our nation's future.



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\* The signers of this statement were either former senior officials of the U.S. government or prominent national security leaders who have not held senior government positions. The positions listed after the names of the former government officials are senior posts held while in office. The positions listed after the names of those who were not from the government are listed with their current position. Institutions are listed for identification purposes only.

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