US withdraws from Iran N-deal: Why Trump is trying to provoke Tehran into regime change

The international agreement that prevented Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons is now just a piece of paper.

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US President Donald Trump’s decision to walk away from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) comes at a difficult moment in West Asia. All evidence seems to take us to the conclusion that the international agreement, which prevented Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, is now just a piece of paper.

However, abandoning the JCPOA is not only based on Trump’s desire to contradict the achievements of the Barack Obama administration, but also to
and that of his own hawkish collaborators, including national security advisor John Bolton and secretary of state Mike Pompeo. The latter firmly believe in the dangers of a hegemonic Iran.

US President Donald Trump shows a signed presidential memorandum reinstating US nuclear sanctions on the Iranian regime on May 8. (Credit: AP photo)

However, although Trump’s decision is not motivated by a desire to send American troops to confront the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, it certainly goes in the direction of regime change in Tehran. At the core of Trump’s perspective lies a desire to provoke Iran into restarting its nuclear programme, which would give Washington the excuse to impose draconian sanctions. Even if harder sanctions on Iran would not cause the regime to collapse, they would weaken Iran’s military adventures in the region while creating a new series of urban riots around the country.

It is true that during its nuclear adventure, the Iranian regime played the card of nationalism in order to bring the population onto its own side. But we should not forget that in the case of economic turmoil and political unrest, Iranians will have to choose between ideology and security for their families –
in short, Trump’s latest political manoeuvre in exiting the Iran deal is not a naïve or unsophisticated move.

The next act of this drama will be in Iranian and European hands. While the Europeans disagree with Trump that the deal itself is “flawed”, they find themselves in a weak strategic position now. The proof of this is that during his state visit to Washington on April 24–26, French President Emmanuel Macron was not able to persuade Trump to stick with the accord.

At the end of his trip, however, Macron told journalists that it is “insane” to oppose agreements recently signed. France, Germany, Britain and their EU partners are conscious of the fact that if they continue to work to preserve the JCPOA, there is a serious risk of a transatlantic rift between the EU and the US. This means continuing economic and political relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran, despite the US imposition of secondary sanctions against European companies.

This decision would be even more difficult to take in case the Iranians actually decide to invite Russia and China to flood Iran with military assistance, technological cooperation, trade deals and investments and to establish military bases in the Persian Gulf and help Iran upgrade its air defense systems.

Unfortunately, neither the Russians, nor the Chinese or the Europeans will be able to totally contain Trump’s strategy which is all about planning to exert maximum damage onto the Iranian economy. Let us not forget that the removal of American sanctions, including on the Iranian oil and banking sectors, has been at the centre of discussions in the past few years in persuading Iran to accept limits on its nuclear programme. That is why, now that the US is out of the deal, the Iranians are asking the Europeans to give them sufficient guarantees and continue staying in the JCPOA.

But the hawkish elements of the Iranian regime, including the Revolutionary Guard, are urging Iran’s supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, to immediately withdraw from the deal and restart suspended elements of the country’s nuclear programme.
More than ever before, Iran is closer to the Korean scenario, because the authorities in Tehran know very well that, as in the case of North Korea, the path to regime survival is through building a robust nuclear weapons programme. This is why Trump’s decision to exit the Iran nuclear deal also makes the danger of a nuclearised West Asia far more likely.

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