

The deal breaker

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It looks like the Iran nuclear deal is ending in turmoil. According to the Associated Press, Donald Trump's aides are preparing for a scenario in which the American president will withdraw the US from the Iran nuclear agreement next month. This will come despite the fact that during his visit to Washington DC, French President Emmanuel Macron urged the US to stay in the multilateral deal, adding that "he did not have a plan B."

The Iranian reaction to the White House did not wait long, since the Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif told CBS's Margaret Brennan in an interview on Sunday that the Islamic Republic of Iran is preparing its own counter-measures "including options that would involve resuming at a much greater speed our nuclear activities." The deadline set by the Trump Administration to negotiate changes to the deal with its European allies is May 12, after which the US is threatening to pull out of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Trump has consistently called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action which was negotiated during [Barack Obama](#)'s presidency by the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany (P5+1) an "embarrassment" that needs to be "corrected". His suspicions in regard to Iran and the deal have grown even bigger, now that he has been joined by hardliners like Mike Pompeo and John Bolton. The American president is also critical of the ways in which the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) verifies Iran's compliance with its commitments because, according to him Iran does not provide full access to its military sites.

Not surprisingly, Trump had already threatened the Europeans back in January to slam the door on the JCPOA and leave the nuclear deal. Talking about "the last chance" after approving the sanctions waiver in January, he added: "I hereby call on key European countries to join with the United States in fixing significant flaws in the deal, countering Iranian aggression, and supporting the Iranian people. If other nations fail to act during this time, I will terminate our deal with Iran."

As far as we can see from the French President's weak reaction to Trump's threat, the European powers have not been able to find a solution to the American exit from the deal. Federica Mogherini, the EU's High Representative for foreign affairs and security policy, has consistently maintained that the EU continues to be "fully committed" to implementing the nuclear deal. France and Germany, however, are looking for ways to accommodate the Trump Administration by putting pressure on Iran over its ballistic missile programme, while asking other member states to agree to new economic and financial sanctions on Iran.

Despite all these efforts, the deal does not stand a chance of surviving, for the simple reason that Russia and China, who are playing the Iranian card, are out of the game of Trump and the Europeans. As we can see from the situation in Syria, Putin's Russia has no shared strategic interests with either the EU or the US and the Chinese see no reason why they should join the Europeans to protect the EU's flagship diplomatic achievement. As for the Iranians, if they do not receive most of the benefits promised by the JCPOA, they also have no strong reasons to continue to honour their side of the bargain.

It is never enough to repeat that Israel and Saudi Arabia, the two allies of the US, are among the severe critics of the Iran nuclear agreement. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is among those who believe that the nuclear deal signed under the presidency of Obama and which is designed to block Iran's path to nuclear weapons would eventually end up by accepting the Iranian bomb. Some Israeli security officials think like Netanyahu that Iran could be a threat to Israel in the long

run, but they are clearly against the military invasion of Iran or the bombing of Iranian nuclear facilities.

The reason, according to them, is not only the nuclear arsenal of Iran, which will take several more years to be built, but the hegemonic position of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Middle East, especially with Russia and China continuing to be close friends of Iran and major supporters of Iranian military capabilities. With such turmoil now in the Middle East, this is also a poor time to be anti-diplomatic and look for tougher solutions.

For anyone genuinely concerned about peace and security in the Middle East, including countries like Israel, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United States, the Iran nuclear deal has done more to preserve the balance of power in the Middle East than almost anything else that has happened with the Iranian regime since the Revolution of 1979. Let us hope that President Trump's decision to leave the JCPOA will not take us to a situation in the region that we become nostalgic for the present gloomy days.

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