

## Deal breaker: on the U.S.' withdrawal from the Iran deal

President Donald Trump's [decision to unilaterally pull the U.S. out of the Iran nuclear deal](#) is a huge setback to multilateral diplomacy and the rules-based international order. The agreement, [signed in 2015 by Iran](#) with the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, Germany and the EU, curtailed its nuclear programme in return for withdrawing economic sanctions. It was reached after 18 months of painful negotiations. Under the deal, most of Iran's enriched uranium was shipped out of the country, a heavy water facility was rendered inoperable and the operational nuclear facilities were brought under international inspection. In Iran, the moderate government of President Hassan Rouhani went ahead with the deal despite strong opposition from hardliners. Mr. Trump has just wrecked all these efforts, despite numerous reports, including from American intelligence agencies, that Iran is 100% compliant with the terms of the agreement. When the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, as the deal is formally called, was signed, many had raised doubts about whether Iran could be trusted to comply with the terms. Three years later, unfortunately, it's the U.S., which had initiated talks with Iran under the previous administration, that has acted in bad faith.

Mr. Trump's decision is not about nuclear weapons. If his administration was actually concerned about Iran acquiring them, it would have supported a deal that closes the path towards nuclear weapons for Iran. Instead, the bigger concern for Mr. Trump as well as Washington's closest allies in West Asia — Israel and Saudi Arabia — is Iran's re-accommodation in the global economic mainstream. They fear that if Iran's economic profile rises, it will embolden it to increase its regional presence, posing a strategic threat to the interests of the U.S.-Saudi-Israel axis. This crisis of trust could have been avoided had the Trump administration built on the goodwill created during the Obama years. Mr. Trump has always been a critic of the Iran deal, and the Islamic Republic in general. Now, by pulling out of the deal he has manufactured a crisis in an already tumultuous region. The U.S. action doesn't necessarily trigger an immediate collapse of the agreement. For now, Europe, Russia and China remain committed to it. Iran has responded cautiously, with the Foreign Minister saying he will engage diplomatically with the remaining signatories. But the challenges will emerge, not only for Europe but also for other nations with strong trade ties with Iran, including India, once American sanctions are in place. The U.S. stands isolated in its decision. But the question is whether Europe and other powers will stick together to respect the mandate of an international agreement, or buckle under American pressure. If they do cave in, West Asia will be a lot more dangerous.

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