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# **NUCLEARIZATION POLITICS: WITHDRAWING TO ENGAGE**

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# NUCLEARIZATION POLITICS: WITHDRAWING TO ENGAGE

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*June 11, 2018*

**Developments:** The Trump Administration withdraws the USA from the JCPOA and reimposes sanctions on Iran.

**Significance:** By withdrawing from the nuclear deal, the USA has at least further increased prospects for regional insecurity. Iranian conservatives gain domestic traction following the USA withdrawal and projections for moderate governmental reforms are effectively incapacitated.

**Directions:** Iran currently remains in the JCPOA, but can retract its role in the agreement and adherence to its terms. Yet, if taking into consideration that Iran was in accordance with the agreement, it has already suffered significant setbacks to its nuclear program already. The member states of Europe can likewise remain in the deal, although this is not a guaranteed scenario either.

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## Summary:

**The Trump Administration has withdrawn** the United States of America (USA) from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and announced the reinstating of sanctions on Iran. The Permanent Five Plus One (P5+1) has consequentially been reduced to four permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) – China, France, Russia, and the United Kingdom (UK) plus Germany (P4+1) – which are still presently engaged in a deal with Iran regarding its nuclear program. International reactions to the USA withdrawal from the JCPOA have ranged from support to disapproval. Regardless, Iran still maintains significant regional influence and tensions in the Middle East have flared. The provocative withdrawal enacted by the Trump Administration additionally contributes to further strengthening the current Iranian regime and simultaneously encourages the Iran to look East for business ventures, thereby facilitating Asianization.

*TAGS:* Americas, Asia, Europe, Middle East, America, Bahrain, China, EU, European Union, France, DPRK, GCC, Germany, Gulf Cooperation Council, Oman, Iran, Israel, KSA, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, North Korea, Persian Gulf, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Switzerland, UAE, United Arab Emirates, UK, United Kingdom, UN, United Nations, UNSC, United Nations Security Council, United States, United States of America, US, USA, 2231, Asianization, ballistic missile, ballistic missiles, IAEA, ICBM, intercontinental ballistic missile, intercontinental ballistic missiles, international affairs, International Atomic Energy Agency, international politics, international relations, Iran Nuclear Deal, JCPOA, Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, missile, missiles, missile defence, missile defense, missile development, nuclear, nuclear deal, nuclear program, nuclearization, P5+1, P4+1, politics, aeronautics and engineering, energy and renewables, government and international relations, peacekeeping and resolution, war and conflict.

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## List of Abbreviations:

<b>CIA</b>	Central Intelligence Agency
<b>DF</b>	Dongfeng
<b>ENEC</b>	Emirates Nuclear Energy Corporation
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>GCC</b>	Gulf Cooperation Council
<b>IAEA</b>	International Atomic Energy Agency
<b>IRBM</b>	Intermediate-range ballistic missile
<b>IRGC</b>	Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps
<b>JCPOA</b>	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
<b>JPA</b>	Joint Plan of Action
<b>KSA</b>	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia / Saudi Arabia
<b>P5+1</b>	Permanent Five Plus One
<b>P4+1</b>	Permanent Four Plus One
<b>SRBM</b>	Short-range ballistic missile
<b>UAE</b>	United Arab Emirates
<b>UNSC</b>	United Nations Security Council
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom
<b>USA</b>	United States of America / United States

**On May 8, 2018 President Donald Trump** announced that the United States of America (USA) would withdraw from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), popularly referred to as the “Iran nuclear deal”<sup>1</sup>. The JCPOA was an agreement reached between the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC)<sup>2</sup> plus Germany (P5+1) with Iran concerning its nuclear program.

The deal was achieved after years of confidence-building engagements and multilateral diplomacy. A prime illustration is evidenced with the adoption of the Joint Plan of Action (JPA)<sup>3</sup> in 2013, which served as an interim agreement between the P5+1 and Iran. The JPA provided lesser economic sanctions to Iran in exchange for a short-term freeze on portions of its nuclear program. Following an additional series of extensions of the JPA that enabled further dialogue, along with further support facilitated by the European Union (EU), formal negotiations culminated with the formation of a nuclear deal framework and the signing of the JCPOA. Iran had agreed to curb its enrichment program and the potential fears of nuclear competition in the Middle East were alleviated. The agreement was consequently hailed as a landmark in international diplomacy.

However, the terms of the JCPOA had been negotiated, agreed to, and signed by the P5+1 with the USA under the leadership of the Obama Administration. Following the 2016 USA elections though came a change in political party. Donald Trump was declared victor and subsequently led the country out of the JCPOA, leaving four of the permanent members of the UNSC plus Germany (P4+1) in a deal with Iran that rendered years of careful diplomacy essentially meaningless with a major and significant player retracting.

Coupled to withdrawing from the JCPOA, President Trump declared the reimplementing of sanctions on Iran. He moreover described Iran as being, “the world’s leading state sponsor of

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-joint-comprehensive-plan-action/> (Last Retrieved: June 10, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America.

<sup>3</sup> Also known as the “Geneva Interim Agreement”.

terror,"<sup>4</sup> and mentioned that Iranian missile defense as well as other military aspects of the country were not a part of the JCPOA<sup>5</sup>, which further justified him leading the USA out of the agreement.

## European Feedback:

**Promptly after the announcement** of the USA withdrawal from the JCPOA, reactions from Europe emerged. Previously, European countries member to the UNSC as well as the European Union (EU) encouraged the Trump Administration to keep the USA in the deal.

### European Union

High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini issued a statement expressing regret regarding withdrawal<sup>6</sup>. She was also keen to note early on in her speech that the JCPOA was unanimously endorsed by UNSC Resolution 2231, which was inclusive of the USA<sup>7</sup>. Further remarks were foreshadowing the commitment of the EU to the preservation of the JCPOA<sup>8</sup>, as Europe certainly has vested interests in establishing greater economic ties with Iran. Of course, it should also be mentioned that while there is European dissatisfaction, it is also nonetheless reliant on the USA for security assistance. Preexisting and developed economic ties between Europe and the USA moreover make it more difficult to compromise in favor of an embryonic market like that of Iran.

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4 <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-joint-comprehensive-plan-action/> (Last Retrieved: June 10, 2018).

5 Ibid.

6 <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2018/05/09/declaration-by-the-high-representative-on-behalf-of-the-eu-following-us-president-trump-s-announcement-on-the-iran-nuclear-deal-jcpoa/> (Last Retrieved: June 10, 2018).

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.



## European Triple Front:

A joint statement was issued from President Emmanuel Macron of France, Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany, and Prime Minister Theresa May of the United Kingdom (UK) that, in similar sentiments shared with the EU, expressed regret towards the USA withdrawal from the JCPOA<sup>9</sup>. It also detailed that according to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Iran had reportedly complied with the terms of the deal in line with its obligations under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons<sup>10</sup>. Justifications regarding greater regional security and stability were provided along with an urging for the USA to remain in the JCPOA<sup>11</sup>. The leaders clearly stated their intention to remain in the deal, but the efforts of the JCPOA could collapse with drivers inclusive of aforementioned economic ties to the USA coupled with a history of joint security cooperation.

## Supplementary United Nations Security Council Feedback:

**Echoing the expressions of regret** and calls for increased state responsibility, the remaining two permanent members of the UNSC – China and Russia – currently maintain their role in the JCPOA. Both are also crucial members of the UNSC in that there are long-standing security and economic ties between China, Russia, and Iran.

## China

At present, China has not yet retracted its role in the JCPOA. It has expressed regret regarding the USA withdrawal from the JCPOA and highlighted that the agreement was between the

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/joint-statement-from-prime-minister-may-chancellor-merkel-and-president-macron-following-president-trumps-statement-on-iran> (Last Retrieved: June 10, 2018).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

P5+1 and Iran<sup>12</sup>. In accordance with the deal, China was to redesign and modernize the Arak heavy water reactor<sup>13</sup>, which according to Article Eight of the JCPOA<sup>14</sup> was to provide a new facility that would be steered away from producing and reprocessing weapons-grade plutonium. Economic interests alone regarding the redesign of the Arak reactor is undoubtedly an enticing project for China to continue pursuing. Moreover, China is a large trading partner with Iran, with particular interests in the petroleum sector, and the two civilizations vaunt millennia of cordial relations.

## **Russia**

Thus far, Russia remains in the JCPOA and has not yet retracted its role in the deal. Russia after all did provide some assistance in developing Iranian nuclear power, as did the USA. However, unlike the USA, Russia maintains important security relations with Iran, inclusive of operations within the Caspian Sea and the greater Middle East; Syria being of particular importance. The ties are likely to be strengthened as a mutually beneficial bilateral relationship is in the best interest of both countries. While apprehensive of the other, both Iran and Russia are performing harmoniously when concerning security issues. Of course, this is not to say that the two are allies, but rather that they maintain common goals and functioning in sync with one another. In this manner, is noteworthy to mention that Russian sales of military hardware to countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) has created a recent area of tension with Iran, but this is unlikely to fracture the operational relationship in other areas.

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<sup>12</sup> [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xwfw\\_665399/s2510\\_665401/t1558096.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/t1558096.shtml) (Last Retrieved: June 10, 2018).

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-nuclear-china/chinese-iranian-firms-to-sign-first-nuclear-plant-redesign-contracts-idUSKBN17M0XS> (Last Retrieved: June 10, 2018).

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/245317.pdf> (Last Retrieved: June 10, 2018).

## Iranian Feedback and Options:

**The Iranian government responded** to the USA withdrawal from the JCPOA and accusations against the country as “the world’s leading sponsor of terror,” by stating that the USA has historically been against the interests of Iran, citing historical foreign interference in domestic affairs, Operation Ajax<sup>15</sup>, and a track record of unreliable regional behavior. It could theoretically retract its role from the deal, but this would certainly not be in the interests nor the desired direction of the country to pursue. After all, Iran was avid to sign a deal, albeit cautiously, that would alleviate economic sanctions against the country, which ideally be able to provide a greater access of funds to the population.

Yet, if Iranian retraction does in fact occur, it will be perceived as an imposed withdrawal and would consequently have the option to move towards restarting its nuclear program. The Arak reactor core had reportedly been filled with concrete and therefore rendered the plant inoperable<sup>16</sup>, which entails that restarting the program would require a great deal of effort on behalf of the Islamic Republic and cost funds that the country cannot comfortably afford. Additional Protocol could also be invoked, but thus far has not been done and will moreover be unlikely given the precarious situation of the Islamic Republic following the flaring of regional tensions and a more confrontational USA administration. Iran could try and wait out the Trump Administration in hopes of a party change, but this would not be a realistic pathway given the degree of associated risks that are inclusive of personality volatility that could readily create more direct engagement, seemingly impulsive political behavior that contributes to unpredictability, as well as the chance of reelection.

Hence, Iran is likely to increase military commitment and arrange heightened security measures regionally in order to preserve its territorial integrity while simultaneously projecting its influence. Evidence of projection is particularly visible in the Mediterranean with

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<sup>15</sup> In 1953 the Central Intelligence Agency in conjunction with support from the United Kingdom staged a coup d’état against the democratically elected government of Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh and replaced the fledgling Iranian democracy with the monarchy of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/gov-inf-2016-1.pdf> (Last Retrieved: June 10, 2018).

Syria and Lebanon, the Persian Gulf with Iraq and Bahrain, the Red Sea with Yemen, as well as Central Asia with Afghanistan. Yet, this will also not be a particularly easy task, especially under renewed economic constraints to an already battered economy. Indeed, there are a number of already set and developing obstacles that will provide Iran with challenges to its ease of maneuverability.

## **Additional International Responses:**

**Supplementary international responses** to the JCPOA withdrawal were inclusive of influential regional actors. Of particular importance would be the Arabian Peninsula countries of the GCC and Israel. All the aforementioned countries have globally integrated economies and nearly every country has an excess of hard capital. The industrious economy of Israel contributes to its lack of dependency on commodity-based capital whereas the GCC rely on petroleum windfall. Nonetheless, while there are differences in the methods of economic generation, the countries maintain cordial relations shared with the USA that extend past the political sphere.

### **Gulf Cooperation Council**

**Members of the GCC vary in stance** towards the USA JCPOA withdrawal as well as relationship with Iran. In this respect, the Sultanate of Oman is by far the most neutral member of the GCC and has exhibited centuries of cordial relations with Iran. Therefore, it was consistent to receive a statement from the Omani Foreign Ministry that stressed a viewpoint of commonality in that Iran and the USA both desired a peaceful solution to their divergences<sup>17</sup>. Indeed, a diplomatic solution would be a multilateral benefit rather than confrontation. Conversely, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) issued a statement that backed

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<sup>17</sup> <http://timesofoman.com/article/133772> (Last Retrieved: June 10, 2018).

the USA decision<sup>18</sup>, which described Iran as being a threat to international security<sup>19</sup>. The KSA has shared an antagonistic relationship with Iran, with each viewing the other as chief rival and hindrance to Middle East supremacy. The United Arab Emirates (UAE), which has been accumulating serious international power in the past decade, issued a similar statement supporting the USA withdrawal<sup>20</sup>. UAE reasoning supporting the USA was inclusive of a concern over the Iranian ballistic missile defense program as well as support for militant groups across the region<sup>21</sup>. Pairing in similar fashion to that of the KSA and UAE would be the Kingdom of Bahrain, which expressed great satisfaction for USA retraction and agreed with the reimplementing of sanctions<sup>22</sup>. Kuwait correspondingly issued a statement that it “understands and respects” the USA decision<sup>23</sup>. However, in stark contrast to the vast majority of the GCC countries that welcomed retraction would be Qatar, which was noticeably more neutral in its response and stated a desire for regional denuclearization as well as the defusing of potential escalation<sup>24</sup>. The Qatari response was particularly noteworthy in that it is a GCC country that was affected by an imposed trade embargo from other GCC members, which has been referred to as the “Qatar Crisis”<sup>25</sup>. During this time, Qatar received reliable support from Iran to mitigate the circumstances of embargo. Hence, while Qatar is member of the GCC, it has been increasingly viewed as shifting its position towards an inclination of supporting Iran, even if the country was previously not inclined to do so.

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-nuclear-gulf/saudi-arabia-says-backs-u-s-decision-to-withdraw-from-iran-nuclear-deal-idUSKBN1I92SH> (Last Retrieved: June 10, 2018).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-nuclear-gulf-reaction/gulf-arab-allies-hail-triumph-after-u-s-quits-iran-deal-idUSKBN1I93CU> (Last Retrieved: June 10, 2018).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.gulf-times.com/story/592127/Qatar-calls-for-keeping-the-region-nuclear-free> (Last Retrieved: June 10, 2018).

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-06-04/ap-news-guide-what-to-know-about-the-year-old-qatar-crisis> (Last Retrieved: June 10, 2018).

## Israel

Israel has shared an aversive relationship with Iran, which has become especially accentuated following the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the South Lebanon Conflict 1985 – 2000, and the catastrophic 2006 Lebanon War. Israel had long been opposed to the JCPOA and therefore, it was no surprise when Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu hailed the USA withdrawal as a “bold decision”, moreover highlighting that Israel thanks President Trump for courageous leadership and a historic move<sup>26</sup>.

## Withdrawing to Engage:

**The Trump Administration is certainly** creating more fertile ground for conflict and direct confrontation with Iran by withdrawing from the JCPOA. Inflammatory language used in speeches previously made by President Trump has been moreover reflected with an increase in USA posturing against Iran, particularly via supporting alliances and counterforces.

## Regional Flares and International Volatility

An immediate consequence following retraction would undoubtedly be the rise in tensions across the Middle East, particularly in Syria and Yemen, where such pressures will result in an intensification of military engagement. This was exemplified with Israel bombarding the demilitarized Madinat al-Baath, Syria<sup>27</sup> followed by Iranian forces launching of 20 rockets into the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights of Syria<sup>28</sup>. Israel then returned fire, striking dozens of

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<sup>26</sup> <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-netanyahu-hails-trump-s-brave-decision-to-quit-iran-nuclear-deal-1.6072052> (Last Retrieved: June 10, 2018) and <https://www.cnn.com/videos/world/2018/05/08/israel-prime-minister-benjamin-netanyahu-iran-deal-reaction-sot.cnn> (Last Retrieved: June 10, 2018).

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-44063022> (Last Retrieved: June 10, 2018).

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/09/iran-fires-20-rockets-syria-golan-heights-israel> (Last Retrieved: June 10, 2018).

targets across Syria, inclusive of Iranian presence<sup>29</sup>. War rages on, Iran remains present in Syria, Russia continues to expand its influence to the Mediterranean, and President Bashar al-Assad has demonstrated that he is a figure that will be difficult to remove.

In Yemen, the KSA-led coalition is ramping up activities in anticipation of seizing the port city of Hodeidah, which is currently under control of Ansar Allah, a group assisted by Iran. While the coalition forces have had recent gains and managed to push back against Ansar Allah, asymmetric factors have been proven to drag on conflicts much longer than anticipated, which likewise has implications for an assault on Hodeidah. In short, asymmetric factors weigh in favor of Ansar Allah in the setting of Yemen and conflict will endure for some time.

## **Pathway to Confrontation**

While the USA and its regional allies<sup>30</sup> are heightening activities that is leading towards confrontation, Iran and its allies will not readily engage the USA or any of its allies in a conventional conflict. Indeed, Iran has intentionally avoided doing so given its lack of conventional capabilities, inclusive of premier military hardware, particularly when compared to those of Western countries. Yet, a country does not need technological superiority to win a conflict, as evidenced by the performance of conventional powers going against asymmetric forces. Rather, irregular and hybrid techniques of warfare are increasingly becoming employed to ensure military success, with even state-sponsored militaries operating with newly formed systems of engagement. In this respect, Iran is readily willing to utilize its own Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), Basij, and proxies to deliver victories. After all, the IRGC is amorphous in its composition and assumes a range of roles across the scope of Iranian influence, such as military advisory. Iran is also a bit more unique in the region in that its population is greater than other countries, has demonstrated to be more dedicated in warfare, has a challenging and varied geography that will pose challenges to invading forces,

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<sup>29</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-israel/israel-strikes-iranian-targets-in-syria-after-rocket-fire-idUSKBN1IA3GF> (Last Retrieved: June 10, 2018) and <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-44063022> (Last Retrieved: June 10, 2018).

<sup>30</sup> Inclusive of Bahrain, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

in addition to a revolutionary and combative interpretation of religious doctrine that is applicable in times of war.

## **Potential Consequences**

In spite of deal retraction, Iran still maintains influence in countries such as Afghanistan, Bahrain, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen. Its influence stretches beyond ethnicity and includes religion, which strengthens its presence in even more countries with a significant Shi'a population such as the KSA, Kuwait, Pakistan, and the UAE. Hence, consequences of potential engagement with Iran would likewise entail with responses of Iranian proxies being militarily intensified and more confrontational in their actions, an increase of insurgency in areas that are not actively outright controlled by Iran, and a rise in anti-Western sentiments that could entail a weakening of USA influence. Petroleum prices could also be projected to go higher, which enhances a notion of volatile pricing that in turn raises risk. It can also be argued that the Islamic Republic is in fact ideologically supported more so than before by the domestic population, with conservatives gaining political traction, following JCPOA withdrawal. Such dangerous irony is certainly not a desirable consequence for the USA to facilitate.

## **Perception and Perspectives:**

**When viewing international relations** with respect to the JCPOA withdrawal, there are a number of interesting misalignments in outlook between members of the international system that become increasingly apparent. One misalignment would be the striking contrast between personalities of President Trump and Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The former is from the unsparing business environment of the USA and the latter being a battle-hardened religious authority. Both have exhibited conservative as well as authoritarian tendencies and pitting the two against each other in an international arena will certainly result in at least some level of undiplomatic accord. Nonetheless, a previously negotiated deal



should be adhered to. Iran reportedly complied with the terms of the JCPOA and according to the IAEA, key components to ensure the success of the deal were being honored<sup>31</sup>. Of key note would be that the calandria or reactor core of the Arak site had been removed and filled with concrete<sup>32</sup>. While there were instances of Iran rising heavy water levels in 2017<sup>33</sup>, the country still kept within the boundaries of the JCPOA and such actions can essentially be dismissed as Iranian communication in context of temporal USA rhetoric.

In the midst of Iranian boldness and USA brashness, withdrawal still seemed unrealistic. After all, provocative and controversial language is regularly used by President Trump as are groundless accusations and backtracking on previously resounded statements. Perhaps it could be argued that intimidation would be a goal in using belligerent rhetoric, but a regime like that of Iran is unlikely to be deterred. Rather, withdrawal has supported the Iranian government and emboldened its conservatives. The notion of a population rising up against the government is unlikely and wishful thinking on behalf of the Trump Administration. While Iranians have demonstrated extreme dissatisfaction with the current government, its motivations are not seeking to overthrow the system. Reformation would be a more correct viewpoint to hold with regards to the Iranian perspective towards the government and many realize the sensitive position their country is in. In this vein, Iran is not looking for a war as it would prefer to focus on developing its economy, but it would also not turn down war, should one be imposed on them.

Withdrawing reflects poorly on the USA and reinforces the hazardous perception of the country being an unreliable and even treacherous partner, unable to honor guarantees and respect its commitments or international law. Certainly, the calls for renegotiation can be construed as ludicrous. It is analogous to buying a house, where parties agree on a price and associated terms, have homeowners move in, and then subsequently call for the renegotiating of the house. International perception is meaningful and it is unwise to risk

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<sup>31</sup> <https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/gov-inf-2016-1.pdf> (Last Retrieved: June 10, 2018).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-nuclear/iran-honoring-nuclear-deal-but-nearing-heavy-water-limit-again-iaea-idUSKBN18T244> (Last Retrieved: June 10, 2018).

reputation in areas like the Middle East, particularly when involved in ongoing conflict. Years of sensitive diplomacy has been disregarded with USA retraction and charged the population of Iran with a newfound negative bias towards the USA, which will be receiving blame for withdrawing and making everyday life harder with the reimplementation of sanctions coupled to its support of countries like those of the GCC against them.

Reasoning exercised by the Trump Administration should also be put into question as thinking that placing an option of military negotiation for any country, especially with a regional power like Iran is a viable pathway to solution. It is unrealistic to think that in a fierce neighborhood like the Middle East, particularly in the Persian Gulf subregion, that it would be practical to propose that any country limit their defense capabilities; especially when the hardware of question is inferior to the equipment of those surrounding them. In this vein, it also begs the question as to whether nuclearization actually signifies realistic projection of nuclear weapons or if it is even needed to generate victories in a neighborhood where Iran commands significant influence.

## **Nuclear Hypocrisy and Atomic Aspirations**

It is noteworthy to mention that when viewing the Iranian nuclear program, there are a number of regional activities that are not covered in as much detail. Of immediate observation would be that the Israelis have never admitted to operating a domestic nuclear program, yet have the Negev Nuclear Research Center<sup>34</sup> in Dimona. Indeed, it would be responsible of the international system to uncover rogue nuclear sites that have not yet been properly reported or ones that are hidden away. It can moreover be argued that it is irresponsible of the IAEA to not invest more attention towards Israel in the same manner that is has with Iran. For Israel to maintain a policy of nuclear ambiguity whereas other countries cannot do so can be unequivocally termed as hypocrisy.

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34 <https://www.haaretz.com/.premium-how-israel-s-nuclear-reactor-was-covered-up-1.5351217> (Last Retrieved: June 10, 2018) and <http://www.nti.org/learn/facilities/418/> (Last Retrieved: June 10, 2018).

In the KSA, the Al Sulayyil ballistic missile site<sup>35</sup> has existed for quite some time and is reported to have a series of missiles capable of delivering a nuclear payload. Namely, such hardware would be inclusive of the Dongfeng (DF)-21 short-range ballistic missiles (SRBMs) that were transferred to the KSA from China with supervision from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in 1988 as well as the DF-3 series of intermediate-range ballistic missiles (IRBMs)<sup>36</sup>. While there have been reports that the DF-21s sold to the KSA were modified to have a shorter range and not be readily nuclear-delivery capable<sup>37</sup>; that is not to say that additional modifications could not occur afterwards so that the hardware would be capable of being outfitted with a nuclear warhead. The DF-3 has been reported to have issues with accuracy, but the missiles would still be quite effective when launching at large area targets, like cities, which do not necessarily require the utmost precision to strike effectively.

In the UAE, nuclear ambitions are being realized with the Barakah nuclear power plant<sup>38</sup>, which is being constructed in conjunction with technological assistance from South Korea<sup>39</sup>. The regulating body for nuclear affairs in the UAE would be the Emirates Nuclear Energy Corporation (ENEC)<sup>40</sup>. The existence of the ENEC signifies the nuclear aspirations for the country as it reserves the potential for future atomic-related research expansion.

## Illusion versus Reality:

**It is a naïve viewpoint to hold** that the Iranian population would attempt to overthrow their government simply because President Trump mentioned that “the Iranian people deserve

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35 <https://www.sciencephoto.com/media/182839/view/al-sulayyil-missile-base-saudi-arabia> (Last Retrieved: June 10, 2018).

36 <http://www.newsweek.com/exclusive-cia-helped-saudis-secret-chinese-missile-deal-227283> (Last Retrieved: June 10, 2018).

37 <http://www.nti.org/learn/countries/saudi-arabia/delivery-systems/> (Last Retrieved: June 10, 2018).

38 <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-03-26/u-a-e-completes-korean-built-nuclear-power-plant-seoul-says> (Last Retrieved: June 10, 2018).

39 Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.enec.gov.ae/> (Last Retrieved: June 10, 2018).

better"<sup>41</sup>, all while demanding that the country have additional measures placed on them to limit conventional self-defense capabilities coupled with economic sanctions. While the Iranian population undoubtedly deserve a better future and a more efficient government, presuming that the public would be able to launch a revolution against an armed and experienced regime like the Islamic Republic is a misconception. It is after all a regional power in a brutal neighborhood and revolution will not be an easy task to successfully perform. In this vein, the population values stability and is much better informed about global affairs than previous generations. It is very much aware of the strategic geography of Iran, its regional influence, and the disastrous situations of neighboring countries. Many would be quick to point out the dire condition of Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria before launching an outright revolution for the change of a regime in their own country. However, that is not to say that the population is particularly satisfied with the performance of the domestic economy nor the inefficient government. After all, the population has protested in the past, all with legitimate grievances, but to no avail.

With regards to regime change, Iran will likely traverse the path of evolution with gradual alterations and modifications being implemented. While Iranians are not satisfied with the rate of progression, shifts had already been occurring. However, the Trump Administration has ironically bolstered the Iranian hardliners and prevented moderates from gaining traction by withdrawing from the JCPOA. Hence, regime evolution is seemingly not going to proceed in as liberal a direction with the current restrictions and can transform to more aggressive tones.

## Conclusion:

**The USA withdrawal from the JCPOA** creates a series of significant implications for the international system. One connotation would undoubtedly be the immediate heightening of

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<sup>41</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-joint-comprehensive-plan-action/> (Last Retrieved: June 10, 2018).

regional tensions in the Middle East, particularly in the Persian Gulf subregion. Another would be the perceived lack of diplomacy exhibited by the Trump Administration that has reinforced the dangerous notion of the USA being an unreliable partner, which extends past proposed alliances and negotiations. Indeed, violation of contract in any setting can be perceived as deceitful and reflects poorly on the perpetrator. An additional consequence would be that the USA can be perceived as an aggressor, which certainly has implications of reflective defense mechanisms that would be raised by the defender. Moreover, the USA appears to be unreasonable in that it is stating that a country weaken its conventional capabilities of self-defense, particularly in a sensitive region where security is more vital and emphasized than in other more cooperative regions of the world. Certainly, demanding any country to do so regardless of regime or security context is an unrealistic stance to maintain. In the setting of the JCPOA, the Iranians are seemingly presented with unattractive options of restricting domestic production of conventional arms, inclusive of missile defense, despite having an already dated and inferior quality arsenal in comparison to their neighbors in addition to the constant threat of even further crippling economic sanctions. Indeed, such options of defense limitations and sanctions can be perceived as unenticing, especially when coupled with the inflammatory language and aggressive tone of delivery presented by President Trump.

Paradoxically, the JCPOA withdrawal has not empowered the Iranian population and in fact done quite the contrary. Rather, it has created the platform for hardliners of the Islamic Republic to reconsolidate power and suppress moderate progression. Stemming from power consolidation endeavors would also be the ability to potentially gather and channel the increasing collective frustrations of the population to extraneous entities, thereby diverting hostilities with the conservative government. In short, retraction may very well have strengthened the precise regime that President Trump argued against in his withdrawal announcement.

Ultimately, Iran is finding itself more so encouraged to look eastward, which furthers a move towards Asianization with the large and ambitious economies of China, India, and Russia readily able to maintain and even strengthen relations with the country. Although eastward

economies are admittedly less developed at present than ones found westward of Iran, the former possess immense growth potential and are rapidly expanding with high thresholds of satiety, which are substantial factors that should not constitute undervaluation nor underestimation.



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