



Iran Nuclear Accord (JCPOA)

The United States Withdraws from the Accord

In May 2018, President Donald Trump withdrew the United States out of the Iran Nuclear Accord, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), that had been established between Iran and the U.S., U.K., France, Germany, China, and Russia under Obama's administration in 2015. Describing the deal as "decaying" and "rotten" in his White House announcement, President Trump stated that: "The Iran deal [was] defective at its core."¹ If the U.S. was to continue with the accord, President Trump said that the U.S., along with the other countries involved, would be unable to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear bomb.²

Knowing that the Iran Nuclear Accord limited and even halted advances towards nuclear development within Iran, President Trump's decision to withdraw from the agreement seems rather contradictory. If his intentions were to further limit Iran's capabilities to develop nuclear weapons, why wouldn't he propose an amendment or create a revised version of the treaty to offer to the other participating members? Why would he risk war with Iran and the potential of them reviving their nuclear efforts?

President Trump's bold move was made to urge for a more detailed and inclusive nuclear treaty that will make Iran's future ability to produce a nuclear weapon essentially non-existent. Whereas, the current accord acts more as a short-term solution with its "sunset clauses," rather than a long-term solution.

Most of these clauses are only effective for a certain period of time after the accord's implementation day, which began in January 2016. For example, under the accord, Iran was "limited to installing no more 5,060 of the oldest and least efficient centrifuges at Natanz until 2026."³ Although this slows the process and quality of their installation, the fact is that it does nothing to prevent Iran from installing them. Centrifuges are a key factor in processing and enriching uranium that could lead to the construction of nuclear weapons. Other clauses and conditions within the accord also have time frames incorporated with them, some even with the possibility of reducing their time restrictions.

So why did the U.S. agree to the accord in the first place?

¹ Rozina Sabur, "Donald Trump announces 'withdrawal' from Iran nuclear deal," *The Telegraph*, May 9, 2018, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/05/08/donald-trump-announces-decision-iran-nuclear-deal-live-updates/>

² Ibid.

³ "Iran Nuclear Deal," *BBC News*, May 8, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-44045957>.

In 2013, when dialogue reopened with Iran under Obama's administration, relations between the U.S. and Iran had been practically non-existent since the 1979 Iranian Revolution.⁴ This was perceived to be a major success for U.S. foreign policy at the time, as this agreement muted a potential nuclear threat to the global community and demonstrated the U.S. as a leader on the world stage, taking a firm stance against Iran with its sanctions.

However, since President Trump took office, his push for "America First" has pulled the U.S. away from the global stage and foreign policy in general. The decision to withdraw from the accord has created certain implications that the U.S. is not acting in the interests of the global community, but to its own opportunistic advantages.

Furthermore, the U.S.' decision to withdraw from the treaty left the other participating countries in a precarious situation as they were forced to try and salvage the agreement or face a nuclear threat. Following the announcement of the U.S.' withdrawal, "the U.K., France, and Germany issued a joint statement saying they 'regret' the [United States'] decision and [made] clear they would remain in the agreement."⁵

Some countries, especially Iran, perceive the U.S.' withdrawal as a violation of international law and duplicity, as the accord was agreement made between the U.S. and Iran, as well as five other countries. This decision has further led to U.S. isolation as it now faces opposition from the European Union over this departure.

Regardless, in November 2018, the Trump administration imposed one of the biggest sanction actions by the U.S. against Iran. These severe economic penalties affected Iran's oil, shipping, and banking industries, as well as weakening their currency.⁶ Despite the U.S.' attempts to pressure Iran into a new deal, President Hassan Rouhani of Iran stated that his country would not bend to "the language of force, pressure and threats," vowing to break the U.S. sanctions.⁷

The animosity and mounting pressure continue to build in 2019, as there has not been any discussion of dropping U.S. sanctions against Iran or creating a new deal to prevent nuclear development and Iranian ballistic missile production.

⁴ Amanda Erickson, "Iran nuclear deal: What you need to know," *The Washington Post*, May 8, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/national/obama-legacy/iran-nuclear-deal-policy.html>.

⁵ Sabur, "Donald Trump announces 'withdrawal' from Iran nuclear deal."

⁶ Rick Gladstone, "Iran Sanctions Explained: U.S. Goals, and the View From Tehran," *The New York Times*, November 5, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/05/world/middleeast/iran-sanctions-explained.html>.

⁷ Ibid.