



Why Is Nikki Haley Peddling Alternative Facts About the Iran Nuke Deal?

Emma Ashford

September 19, 2017

In an [address at the American Enterprise Institute](#) on September 5, Nikki Haley, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, laid out an assertive and fundamentally misleading case against continuing U.S. participation in the Iranian nuclear deal.

Though Haley was careful to note that she was not calling for the United States to actively withdraw from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), she offered a selection of “alternative facts” and carefully phrased arguments clearly aimed at justifying President Trump’s desire to do just that.

Haley’s arguments carefully skirted around the actual facts. The key problem for the Trump administration’s desire to withdraw from the JCPOA is simple: Iran is actually adhering to the terms of the deal. Rather than attacking the deal head on, therefore, Haley instead argued that the United States should consider factors outside the legal scope of the deal when deciding its future.

Indeed, though she cited many different reasons to take a harder line against Iran—including a litany of Iran’s past bad behaviors, the regime’s actions in Syria and elsewhere, and its missile testing—none of these are actually covered by the nuclear deal. Haley even suggested that Iran could have hundreds of covert nuclear sites which cannot be inspected under the deal, but offered no evidence for her assertion.

Her portrayal of the nuclear agreement was also misleading. As she described it: “The deal he [President Obama] struck wasn’t supposed to just be about nuclear weapons. It was meant to be an opening with Iran; a welcoming back into the community of nations.” In Haley’s account, these broad goals justify the use of a broader lens in deciding whether to stick with the deal or not.

There’s just one problem: the Obama administration was always clear to stress that the JCPOA was first and foremost a nonproliferation agreement, focused on preventing an Iranian bomb, not on fixing every problem in the U.S.-Iranian relationship. Though she never stated it so bluntly,

Haley's remarks amount to an argument that these broader issues are worth jettisoning even a successful nonproliferation agreement that is preventing an Iranian nuclear weapon.

Perhaps the most misleading statement in the Ambassador's remarks was her assertion that Trump's choice to decertify the deal would not actually amount to U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA, but would merely allow congress to debate the issue.

Yet it would also result in a congressional vote on re-imposing nuclear related sanctions on Iran, potentially withdrawing the United States from the deal and splitting us from European allies.

Unusually for this administration, Nikki Haley's arguments today were well-crafted, clearly delivered and plausible-sounding. But listeners should not be fooled: they nonetheless embraced the Trump administration's universe of "alternative facts."

U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA could easily set Iran back on the path to a nuclear weapon, and re-open the debate over military action which occurred prior to the finalization of the nuclear deal. By ignoring the risks and eliding basic facts, Haley's arguments are likely only to undermine U.S. foreign policy.

Emma Ashford is a research fellow at the Cato Institute.