



Glaser: Enforcing Iran nuke deal crucial for Mideast peace

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Much is unknown about how Donald Trump's foreign policy will play out. If the experience of his predecessors is anything to go by, the Middle East will attract outside time and resources, no matter how much the administration tries to focus on Europe or Asia. When that historically irresistible draw happens, Trump's priority should not be peace between Israel and Palestine or even renewing the fight against ISIS. It should be sustaining and enforcing the Iran nuclear deal.

To recap, the Iran nuclear deal, was negotiated by Iran and the U.S. along with five other nations — the U.K., France, Russia, China, and Germany. It imposed stringent controls and invasive inspections on the Iranian nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief. Since the agreement, Iran has reduced its stockpile of centrifuges by two-thirds, gotten rid of about 95 percent of its low-enriched uranium, and begun converting two major enrichment sites into peaceful research centers.

Iran's nuclear program is now the most intensely monitored nuclear program in the world. Inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency are on the ground in Iran every month scrutinizing all related facilities, and continuous video surveillance watches the entirety of the nuclear fuel chain.

As a recent report from the International Crisis Group put it, the deal has so far succeeded in "effectively and verifiably blocking all potential pathways for Iran to race toward nuclear weapons."

But as successful as it has been in blocking an Iranian nuclear weapons program, the deal rests on shaky ground. In the U.S., opponents of the deal have pounced on the few minor technical infractions — normal in any arrangement of such complexity — that have occurred on the Iranian side, none of which amounted to material breaches.

More troubling is the Trump administration's decidedly confrontational approach toward Iran. Trump's top national security adviser, Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, hates the deal and thinks regime change is a better option. Trump's newly sworn CIA director, former U.S. Rep. Mike Pompeo, has advocated "rolling back" the "disastrous" deal.

Trump himself has less consistent views on the matter. During the campaign, he promised numerous times to rescind sanctions relief and rip up the agreement. But he also promised to “stop racing to topple foreign regimes that we know nothing about.” Since the deal accomplishes this goal by eliminating the primary justification for a U.S. attack on Iran, Trump should be reluctant to tear it up.

Moreover, Trump’s Secretary of Defense Gen. James Mattis, although a major critic of the deal, has consistently said enforcement is the right approach. Maintaining the agreement also happens to be the international consensus, including not only all of our European allies but also Russia, a regime Trump seems eager to please.

Still, the incentives President Trump faces appear ominously tilted against careful enforcement of the Iran nuclear deal. Sustaining the agreement requires Trump, not known for his sober intellect, to look beyond Iran’s rhetoric and foreign policy and mentally frame it strictly as a nonproliferation agreement. It requires the president’s affirmative renewal of the waivers on nuclear-related sanctions every 120 or 180 days. It also calls for resisting the Republican-controlled Congress, which is largely opposed to any mutual agreement with Iran.

What the Trump administration needs to understand is that pulling out of the deal would be all loss and no gain. The Iranian parliament has mandated renewed uranium enrichment and reduced transparency for U.N. inspectors if the U.S. fails to live up to the deal’s stipulations. Furthermore, the U.S. will have no leverage to force harsher terms on Iran because our European allies, along with Russia and China will undoubtedly blame Washington for renegeing — and all would refuse to re-impose sanctions.

More than anything else, the Iran nuclear deal must be kept because the alternative is a return to ever-heightening tensions and clamoring by hawks in both countries. From 2003 to 2014, years of unrelenting U.S. sanctions and confrontation, Iran went from 164 centrifuges to 19,000. The hostile approach generates a more expansive, less transparent Iranian nuclear program and increases the chances for another disastrous U.S. war in the Middle East. Let’s hope the Trump administration chooses not to go that route.

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