



Conservatives should want to preserve the Iran nuclear deal

John Glaser

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Following the Obama administration's signing of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, which significantly rolled back Iran's nuclear program and imposed rigorous limitations on it for the foreseeable future, Congress passed legislation requiring the president to certify every 90 days that Iran is complying with its obligations under the agreement.

President Trump has done this twice so far. But he has given strong indications that he will refuse to do it a third time. With the next 90-day deadline approaching on October 15, the survival of the Iran deal hangs in the balance.

The problem with Trump's stated intention to refuse to certify Iranian compliance is that Iran is, in fact, fully complying. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the UN's nuclear watchdog, has affirmed eight separate times in detailed reports that Iran is abiding by the deal. America's European allies, the Russians, the Chinese – all agree Iran has not committed any violations.

Even Trump's top Cabinet officials, including Defense Secretary James Mattis, national security adviser H.R. McMaster, and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, have encouraged the president to certify Iranian compliance with the deal and thereby avoid its unraveling.

And for good reason. Conservatives especially should insist that, so long as Iran doesn't cheat, the United States must not deliberately scuttle the agreement. The reason is simple: it staves off an Iranian nuclear breakout capability for at least the next couple of decades, and probably indefinitely.

Recall that the nuclear deal required Iran to give up 98 percent of its stockpile of enriched uranium, dismantle two-thirds of its operating centrifuges, and convert a number of its major enrichment facilities into peaceful research centers, among other concessions.

Iran also submitted to a long list of specific restrictions that will phase out over the next 10-25 years. Opponents of the deal have seized upon these time-limited restrictions as proof that the deal isn't good enough. But they forget that Iran also agreed to ratify the Additional Protocol of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which provides for expanded IAEA access and monitoring indefinitely into the future.

What used to be one of the world's most opaque and worrisome nuclear programs is now the world's most transparent. The IAEA now conducts frequent, sometimes daily, inspections at almost 30 different sites in Iran. Some sites are subject to 24-hour video surveillance. Indeed, the

IAEA has conducted more "snap inspections" in Iran -- about two per month – than in any other country in the world.

According to Georgetown University professor and nonproliferation expert Ariane Tabatabai, the Iran deal represents "the most intrusive inspections regime ever voluntarily agreed to by any party." The head of the IAEA agrees, saying earlier this month in a speech that "Iran is subject to the world's most robust nuclear verification regime."

Deliberately abrogating the arrangement would throw all of this away. Plus, it would undermine the moderates in Tehran, who just won reelection by wide margins, and bolster the hardliners who want to antagonize America with provocative actions and blustery rhetoric.

If Iran truly poses the threat most conservatives say it does, it's far better for Iran to be constrained by the nuclear deal than unburdened from its obligations due to the Trump administration's decision to blow it up.

For what it's worth, much of the Israeli military and national security community agrees. Carmi Gillon, former director of Israeli's Shin Bet, wroteback in July that the nuclear deal "has been a clear success" and that, "while the majority of my colleagues in the Israeli military and intelligence communities supported the deal once it was reached, many of those who had major reservations now acknowledge that it has had a positive impact on Israel's security and must be fully maintained by the United States and the other signatory nations."

If Trump refuses to certify Iranian compliance next month, he will put the survival of the nuclear deal at risk and massively increase the chances that Iran's nuclear program goes back into the shadows and is once again purposed to obtain a nuclear weapon. That is a dangerous and needless risk that no conservative should want to take.

Ronald Reagan understood the value of pursuing robust arms control agreements with America's enemies. In a speech at the United Nations in 1984, he called for engaged diplomacy with the Soviet Union, even then a far greater threat to U.S. security than Iran is now, "to reduce the vast stockpiles of armaments in the world, especially nuclear arms; and to establish a working relationship between our two countries marked by a greater understanding."

Reagan always insisted on negotiating from a position of strength. And he did so with the Soviets. Iran's military capabilities pale in comparison to Moscow's, the only other great power in the world at the time. America is still the world's greatest superpower. The Iranian nuclear program is neutered under this deal. We should keep it that way.

John Glaser is director of foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute.