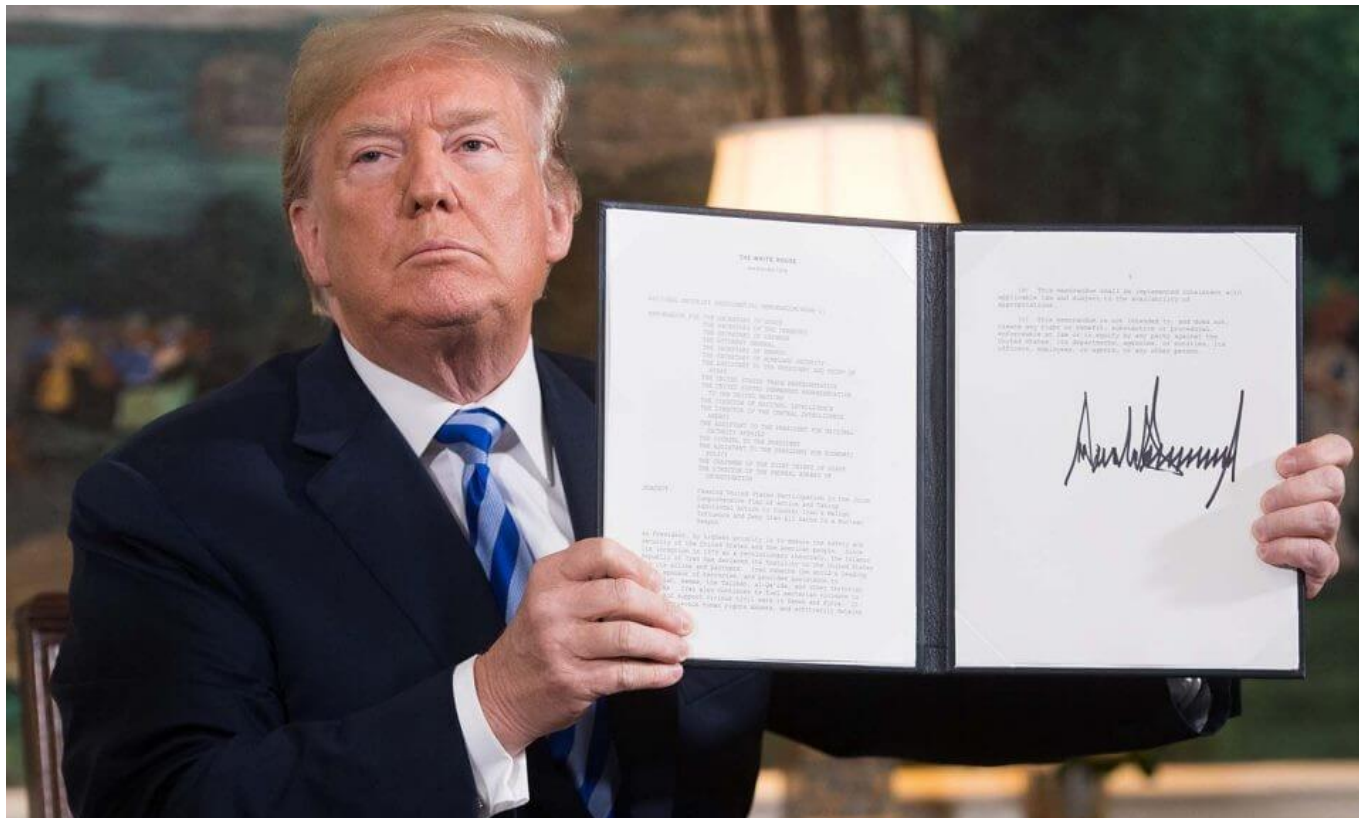


The art of breaking a deal

by **Pepe Escobar** on [Asia Times](#)



Donald Trump's decision to leave the JCPOA will not open the path to an Iranian nuclear weapon

Breaking the unwritten rules of global diplomacy, the Trump administration is now in [violation](#) of the multilateral Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or in plain language the Iran nuclear deal. Nuance is notoriously absent in what can only be described as a unilateral hard exit.

All suspended United States sanctions against Iran will be [reinstated, and harsh additional ones](#) will be imposed.

It does not matter that the International Atomic Energy Agency, or IAEA, repeatedly confirmed Iran was [complying](#) with the JCPOA as verified by 11 detailed reports since January 2016. Even US Secretary of Defense James Mattis vouched for the stringent verification mechanisms.

Facts appear to be irrelevant, though. The JCPOA is the Obama administration's only tangible foreign policy success, so, for domestic political reasons, it had to be destroyed.

President Donald Trump's opening address to the "Iranian people" during his White House speech also does not cut it. The overwhelming majority of Iranians support the JCPOA, and

counted on it to alleviate their economic plight.

Moreover, Trump's regime change advisers support the exiled People's Mojahedin Organization, or MEK, which is [despised](#) beyond belief inside Iran.

As a minor subplot, rational geopolitical actors are asking what sort of national security advisor would strategically "advise" his boss to blow up a multilateral, United Nations-endorsed, working nuclear deal?

[Trump formally announces US to leave Iran deal](#)

To cut to the chase, the US decision to leave the JCPOA will not open the path to an Iranian nuclear weapon. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, who has the last word, repeatedly [stressed](#) these are un-Islamic.

Regime change

It will not open the path toward regime change. On the contrary, Iran hardliners, clerical and otherwise, are already capitalizing on their interpretation from the beginning – Washington cannot be trusted.

And it will not open the path toward all-out war. It's no secret every Pentagon war-gaming exercise against Iran turned out nightmarish. This included the fact that the Gulf Cooperation Council, or GCC, could be put out of the oil business within hours, with dire consequences for the global economy.

President Hassan Rouhani, in his cool, calm, collected response, emphasized Iran will remain committed to the JCPOA. Immediately before the announcement, he had already said: "It is possible that we will face some problems for two or three months, but we will pass through this."

Responding to Trump, Rouhani stressed: "From now on, this is an agreement between Iran and five countries ... from now on the P5+1 has lost its 1... we have to wait and see how the others react.

"If we come to the conclusion that with cooperation with the five countries we can keep what we wanted despite Israeli and American efforts, Barjam [the Iranian description of the JCPOA] can survive."

Clearly, a titanic internal struggle is already underway, revolving around whether the Rouhani administration – which is actively working to diversify the economy – will be able to face the onslaught by the hard-liners. They have always characterized the JCPOA as a betrayal of Iran's national interest.

Following Rouhani, "others" reacted quickly. The European Union's big three of Germany, France and Britain made it clear that trade and investment ties with Iran would not be sacrificed.

Those views were echoed by the EU's leading diplomat Federica Mogherini in a [statement](#).

[President Donald Trump Delivers Remarks On Iran Deal – May 8, 2018 | CNBC](#)

Still, the key question now is how, in an interlinked global economy, European banks will be able to manage trade facilitation.

Diplomats in Brussels told Asia Times that the EU is already devising a [complex](#) mechanism to protect European companies doing business in Iran. This is something that has been discussed between Iranian and the EU3 diplomats.

Yet in the event the EU3 capitulates, even with support from Russia and China, the JCPOA will be effectively over with unpredictable consequences. These would include Iran's possible exit from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

On the crucial oil front, Gulf traders told Asia Times that even with new US sanctions, and the possibility of crude being priced way beyond the current US\$70-a-barrel, up to 1 million barrels a day of Iranian oil would simply disappear from global markets.

If the EU, which imports 5% of its oil from Iran, buckles under too much pressure, these exports will be relocated to Asian customers such as China, India, Japan and South Korea.

The US decision has also cast a shadow over the upcoming US-North Korea summit. The perception in Pyongyang – not to mention Beijing and Moscow – will be inevitable – the US can not be trusted.

For all its faults, the JCPOA remains a complex, painstakingly designed multilateral agreement, which took 12 years of diplomacy to broker, and was sanctioned by the UN.

Key hub

The geopolitical consequences are massive. To start with, strategically, Washington is isolated. The only actors applauding the decision to rip up the deal are Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

As Iran is a key hub of the ongoing Eurasia integration process, the trade-investment partnership with both Moscow and Beijing will be even stronger as Asia Times has [reported](#).

On the military front, nothing will prevent Russia from supplying Iran with S-400 missile systems or China with its "carrier-killers."

The JCPOA was a dizzyingly complex technical undertaking. In parallel, it is no secret the US establishment never got over the 1979 Islamic revolution. The privileged roadmap in the Beltway remains [regime change](#).

The real US objective – way beyond the JCPOA's technicalities – was always geopolitical. And

that meant stopping to Iran from becoming the leading power in Southwest Asia.

That still applies as seen by the United States Central Command's recent [drive](#) "to neutralize, counterbalance and shape the destabilizing impact Iran has across the region..." Or, in Trump terminology, to curtail Iran's "malign activities."

CENTCOM commander, Gen. Joseph Votel, went straight to the heart of the matter when he told the US House Armed Services Committee in February that "both Russia and China are cultivating multidimensional ties to Iran ... Lifting UN sanctions under the joint comprehensive plan of action opens [the] path for Iran to resume application to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization."

In a nutshell, this betrays the entire project which is to thwart the Eurasia integration process, which features Russia and China as peer competitors aligning with Iran along the New Silk Roads.

Predictably, we are back to the late Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski's book, *The Grand Chessboard*.

"...Potentially the most dangerous scenario would be an 'anti-hegemonic' coalition united not by ideology but by complementary grievances ... a grand coalition of China, Russia, perhaps Iran ... reminiscent in scale and scope of the challenge posed by the Sino-Soviet bloc, though this time, China would likely be the leader and Russia the follower," he wrote. "Averting this contingency ... will require US geostrategic skill on the western, eastern, and southern perimeters of Eurasia simultaneously."

So, Trump has reshuffled the Grand Chessboard. Persians, though, happen to know a thing or two about chess.